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...and how to run them

WORLD EXCLUSIVE ACCESS

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MANKIND DIVIDED

WE PLAY THE AUGMENTED SEQUEL

PREVIEWED

TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER
HANDS-ON WITH THE STRATEGY CROSSOVER

+

HEARTS OF IRON IV
HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION
NEED FOR SPEED

REVIEWED

SOMA
THE BEST HORROR GAME OF THE YEAR

Future Issue 273 **HOLIDAY 2015**

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PC GAMER

#273 HOLIDAY 2015

Revolution

Deus Ex is one of PC gaming's greats, and in a lot of ways encompasses the type of game we associate with the PC. Most notably, there was a strong element of choice in the 2000 original that proved to be incredibly influential—2011's *Human Revolution* was so successful because it revisited and reinterpreted those ideas. In *Mankind Divided*, Eidos Montreal builds on that legacy to further facilitate player choice, as well as allowing its protagonist, Adam Jensen, to literally turn into triangles. Can't wait.

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Our team of writers

TYLER WILDE
Twitter
@tyler_wilde
Currently playing
The Beginner's Guide
This month
Stepped into a developer's mind and partially enjoyed it there.

WES FENLON
Twitter
@wesleyfenlon
Currently playing
Dungeon of the Endless
This month
Crossed over with PCG UK's Samuel to conquer floors of monsters.

CHRIS LIVINGSTON
Twitter
@screencuisine
Currently playing
Prison Architect
This month
Attempted to break out of a Star Wars prison, leaving several dead.

Contents #273
HOLIDAY 2015

36
DEUS EX
Tom heads to Eidos Montreal to play the long-awaited sequel to *Human Revolution*. Join him as he battles robots in future-Prague.

42
THE 30 BEST GTA V MODS
The pick of the mods you can download for the PC version, and how to install them.

86
SKYLAKE BOARDS
Skylake-ready motherboards reviewed by the majestic Dave James.

SEND

A free Steam key for the funniest or most insightful letter every month

Time to upgrade Andy

In PCG 271, Andy Kelly says he doesn't use his Microsoft account on login with Windows 10 because it's "much slower". When I login with mine, it takes literally an eye blink to get to the desktop.

While I haven't found Cortana to be that useful so far, I see no reason to disable it. I'm not especially paranoid about being tracked and the RAM and CPU usage is negligible unless your machine sucks. Perhaps it's time to upgrade, Andy? ■
Mike Fulton

The time Andy's referring to is how long it takes to search his desk for the scrap of paper containing his old, unused Microsoft account password. As for Cortana, even small reductions in CPU usage are welcome, especially if, like Andy, you need tens of Twitter tabs open at once. PCG

We know it, you know it: PC gaming wins over consoles.

WINNER!

✉ I once thought all this

I started leaning more towards consoles because they were approachable, easier to use, and you didn't have to wade through as much bullshit to play the fucking games. There cannot possibly be a future, I thought, in a gaming platform that deliberately reduces and alienates its potential audience.

It amazes me that I once thought all this. As I start considering my options in terms of gaming desktop PCs, I am thinking exactly the same things about the next generation of consoles. PC gaming still has issues, but these problems seem small. The new consoles require me to be online to perform the simplest of actions. Even in the best case, the vast majority of next-gen's selling points require an internet connection and annual subscription.
Arjun Bothra

PC gaming isn't perfect, but we love it anyway. One of the main benefits is the lack of a single platform holder, so companies must compete by offering a better service. Welcome aboard, Arjun! PCG

The lowest they'll go

I see you guys are recommending the Pentium G3258 for your low-end build. I read an article a while back that claimed games aren't running on dual-core CPUs anymore. A quick check of some newish games, and they all list Core i5 or even Core Duo Quad as the lowest they'll go. ■
Everet York

True, some new titles don't play well with dual-core. If you want to run the latest games without having to research compatibility, try our mid-range build. PCG

The risk is too great

On the subject of sequels, one point I feel can be made is that originality and risk can often come from indie devs. Successful mechanics and ideas are then 'borrowed' and implemented into triple-A games. We do still see evolution rather than revolution.

We might not get new IPs, but it doesn't really matter as long as the game is good. We have seen triple-A games fail and then the developer close, so the risk is too great when one badly received game can be the end of a studio. ■
Ian Mills

Good point, but can you really call it 'evolution' if publishers are stealing all of their new ideas from indie devs? [Not that we're accusing publishers of stealing—Legal Ed.] PCG

The fear of history

I felt conflicted seeing *Half-Life 2* ranked #1 in the Top 100. It's my favorite game of all time, but Valve's neglect of the series and its fan base have made me no longer proud of that fact. ■
Russel Ekin

Even if a sequel never happens, *Half-Life 2* is still one of the best designed shooter campaigns. But yes, we'd very much like a sequel. Call us, Valve? PCG

USER REVIEWS

■ I am playing *Viscera Cleanup Detail*. Mopping up blood? Incinerating bodies? Seeing facilities shine after hard labor? Satisfying.
Ryan Tee
How do you fancy joining our janitorial team? Your skills would be appreciated.

■ Playing *Half-life 2* again. Greatest game ever made. Every time you play, you are surprised at how they pulled it off.
Non-Flying Dutchman
Seriously Valve, call us. It's been nine years since *Episode 2*.

■ Finishing off *Fallout 3* again, getting ready for *Fallout 4*! It's getting me so hyped!
Ross Byrne
Who knew the near-destruction of humanity could be so exciting?

■ *AdVenture Capitalist*. Progress bars, multipliers, clicking. It's hardly even a game. Why do I love it so much?
Brian Demodulated
Because you have a sickness and you need help.

■ Currently playing *The Witcher 3* on my brand new, first ever PC rig. On ultra it's so pretty that sometimes I just cry and stroke the TV.
Dave Duffin
We too sometimes break down in tears at the sight of Geralt's marvellous shrubbery.

"Offering top-tier quality, performance, and acceptable noise levels, the EKWB Predator 240 has set itself apart from the competition." – TechPowerUp.com

240

"This pre-assembled kit is as close as it can be to purchasing liquid cooling components and creating your own liquid cooling loop … " – Guru3D.com

360

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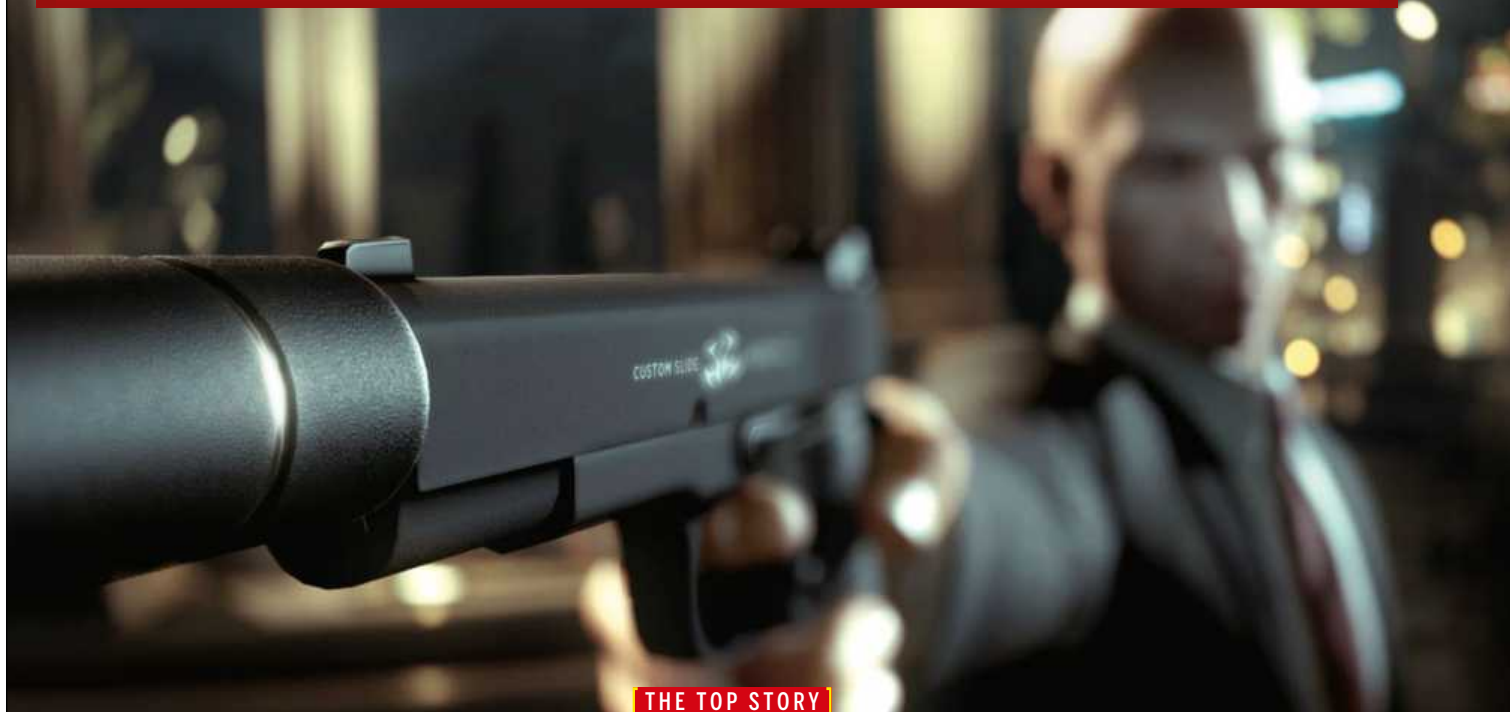
THE TOP STORY

HITMAN SLIPS TO 2016

And **AGENT 47** isn't the only one keeping us waiting until next year

The new *Hitman* was originally scheduled for a December release, but has been pushed back to March 2016. "These few extra months will mean we can add more to the launch content of the game," developer Io Interactive says. After an initial release, which will feature "a good chunk" of content, updates will be released, adding more levels, weapons, etc. "This will ultimately make a better game for everyone," Io has promised.

2K Games has also announced that anticipated strategy sequel *XCOM 2* will be delayed for three months, releasing in June next year rather than, as was originally planned, November 2015. "We've set a high bar for the sequel," says developer Firaxis. "We want to have more depth, more replayability, and more investment in your soldiers. This extension will give us the time we need to deliver this."

Other high profile delays include Ubisoft's *The Division*. In 2014 it was delayed until 2015, and it was then delayed again to March 2016. *Homefront: The Revolution* was also pushed back to 2016. The game has changed hands twice, firstly after the demise of THQ, when it was bought by Crytek, then again last year from Crytek to Deep Silver.

OFF TRACK

The next game in the *Trackmania* series, *Trackmania Turbo*, has been pushed back to 2016 by Ubisoft, apparently to polish its online features. "The extra time will give us

an opportunity to make sure that the online infrastructure is stable and that the online experience is a smooth one," Ubisoft said in a statement on its website.

It's not just big publishers delaying their games, either. Kickstarted *Mega Man* spiritual successor *Mighty No. 9* has been delayed to 2016 as well. "As we have communicated in the updates to our backers, all of the core content for the game is developed and in a complete state," says developer Comcept. "However, there are still bugs and issues pertaining to the online features that are included in the game."

PC Gamer's advice? Don't worry about any of these delays. *Just Cause 3, Rainbow Six Siege, Fallout 4, Legacy of the Void, Star Wars Battlefront*, and others are still on schedule. Unless they've been delayed since we printed this, of course. And let's be honest: you still have 4,000 unplayed games in your Steam library. Just look at these delays as a chance to get through them. ■
Andy Kelly

> ## LET'S BE HONEST: YOU STILL HAVE 4,000 UNPLAYED GAMES IN YOUR STEAM LIBRARY
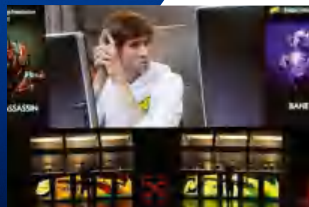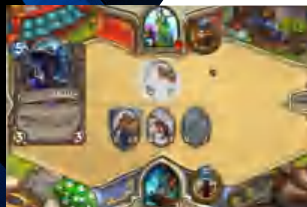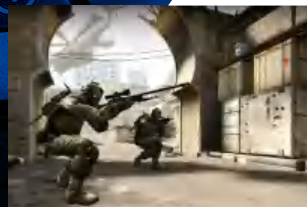
OPINION

MGSV has set new benchmarks

"HAS MGSV RUINED OTHER VIDEOGAMES?"

Metal Gear's competitors are unlikely to match its highly open mission structure for years to come

In a recent attempt to beat one of *GTA Online*'s heists with my fellow PC Gamer staff member Tom Senior, we found ourselves surrounded by criminals in a car park and unable to fend them off. Having recently reviewed *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* for this magazine, I had an idea that used the tools around us: screw the criminals, why not jump in a car and drive off while our teammates pick off the gunmen? We were penalized for leaving the mission area. Furious, we both had to start again due to this arbitrary rule.

GTA V has a spectacular open world, but *MGSV* has highlighted to me that its missions aren't open-world missions— they're linear and scripted in most cases, and I'm not sure this is something that bothered me until I played *The Phantom Pain*. Now I want the freedom to do things my way. And I think many of that game's players will feel the same. Look at any modern open-world game now and it's painfully obvious that most are linear games that happen to be set in a giant world, with varying degrees of success.

EVEN *FAR CRY* WILL HAVE TO UP ITS GAME NEXT TIME AROUND

If *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* is roughly similar to *Unity*, I think it'll suffer in *MGSV*'s wake. Even *Far Cry* will have to up its game next time around. It's not just about giving players the tools to create unique stories, it's about having mission structures that permit them to ignore doing what they're told. Is it too much to expect developers to step up and bring this to big-budget games, or will this be seen as a design touch that belongs to *The Phantom Pain*, boxed off, while most open-world games continue with linear missions? I fear the latter is more likely for the next couple of years at least—but eventually the other games will need to catch up.

It's not that everything should be exactly like *MGSV*—it's just that it has lessons for every kind of game. In *GTA V*'s case, what might a mission be like if you could ignore the objective and figure out your own approach, set up traps for the AI or learn new things about the mission along the way? *The Phantom Pain* has made me think about the future of game design in ways I hadn't fully pondered before—and it's now very hard to see comparable games in any other way. ■
Samuel Roberts

THE SPY

The Spy has Smiley's lighter.

T he Spy would never take an office job. For the Spy, offices are things to be scaled and infiltrated, not entered and inhabited. The Spy is, however, very good at taking minutes—albeit secretly, from the vent space adjacent to the meeting room. It's amazing what you can learn in vents. For instance, how to synergise a brand. Or, how Q3's year-on-year performance proves that management's strategy for mobilizing engagement simply isn't energizing the target demographic enough.

Or maybe you'll learn about a company's latest job openings. Like how Blizzard is looking to hire an art director for an unannounced **Diablo** project. The listing specifically references "Blizzard's next hit game," although, based on the available evidence, a *Diablo IV* reveal seems unlikely. *Diablo III* has gone from strength to strength since *Reaper of Souls* was released. Based on the most recent patch, it doesn't seem like Blizzard is ready to leave its current ARPG behind.

Then there's the matter of a leaked project timeline from back in 2010. It claimed that *Diablo III*

would receive two expansions. While the release dates no longer match up—the chart suggested that *Reaper of Souls* would be out a year before its actual release date—that could be attributed to delays and shifting priorities. It would be a bold move to announce a project before an art director was in place, but if Blizzard is ready to tease some information, BlizzCon would be the obvious place to do it. That's set to kick off on November 6.

Konami's office building must hold some fascinating vents. Back in August, a report from the Japanese financial paper Nikkei told a tale of a paranoid and punitive company that demoted developers down to janitorial positions, and refused to give permanent email addresses to

IT'S POSSIBLE KONAMI ACCIDENTALLY MADE ITS DEVELOPERS INTO CAFETERIA WORKERS

staff. More recently, rumors have reached the Spy's digital ears that the company is moving away from PC and console games altogether i to focus on mobile development.

French site Gameblog.fr claimed that Konami had stopped production on all major games, save for the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series. The same site also alleged that Konami worldwide technology director Julien Merceron, the man responsible for overseeing the Fox Engine, had left the company due to this supposed transition away from PC and console development.

A couple of Konami employees have denied that such a move has taken place. The first came via Konami Customer Support—not necessarily the most official source of information on high-level managerial policy. The second was Konami UK community manager Graham Day, who told Game On Daily that not only would **Metal Gear Solid** continue, but that the series could still succeed without Kojima at the helm. The Spy has yet to be convinced that another director could so accurately model what '80s espionage was really like.

UNEXPECTED BJ
An official Konami statement isn't forthcoming. It's always possible that the company wants to continue making PC games, but, in a fit of pique, accidentally made all of its developers into cafeteria workers. It's important to use the right people for the right job, as the Spy found out during a doomed attempt to train simian paratroopers.

BJ Blazkowicz is the right man for any job— especially if that job is shooting Nazis or mumbling folksy monologues about war and childhood. Machine Games knocked it out of the park with **Wolfenstein: The New Order**, and now it looks like a sequel is on the way.

The source is Alicja Bachleda-Curus, who voiced BJ's nurse-cum-significant other in *The New Order*. Speaking to Polish TV station TVN, she said, "I'm working on a videogame, the first part of which I have already made. Now we're making a second one, which will take two more years." It's possible she's talking about another game series, except (1) she hasn't worked on any, and (2) she went on to say, "I played this game as a child. I was very happy when I got to the point where I could shoot Hitler."

The Spy wonders what's planned for the alt-history sequel. A secret lair in the heart of Mars? A secret lair in the heart of a volcano? A secret lair in the heart of Konami? Anything's possible. Spy out. ∎
The Spy
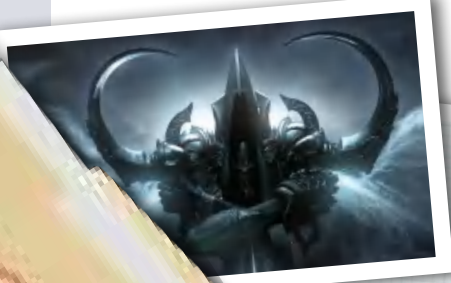
SHOPPING LIST

VENT GREASE
SNAKE REPELLENT
MONKEY BITE LOTION
PHONE NO. FOR NAZI ESTATE AGENT

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	LINK
2016	The Creative Assembly	Sega	www.warhammer.totalwar.com

TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

Killing spider cavalry with flamethrower Dwarfs

I'm in The Creative Assembly's Horsham studio to see *Total War: Warhammer* again. This time I'm here for two things: an introduction to the Dwarfs and to play another Quest Battle, The Ambush of Thundering Falls. As ever, the devs are saving our first experience of the campaign for when they've actually got around to making the thing.

The Dwarfs' aim, at the campaign level, is to right ancient wrongs. "They have their own unique mission system where, if you do something to piss them off, it will launch a grudge mission," says CA's Jim Whitston, lead level designer. "They have to resolve all their grudges before they achieve their victory conditions." The Dwarfs are also unlikely to expand their campaign territory as in traditional *Total War* games—they're more concerned with regaining their lost holds from the Orcs and Goblins, who in their own turn want to conquer more Dwarf holds, and to raid the human Empire for loot.

We've already seen one of the Empire's late game Quests, the Battle of Blackfire Pass, where the Emperor Karl Franz must fend off a horde of high level Orcs. Thundering Falls features the Dwarfs fighting against Orcs and Goblins. "At its core, it's still a *Total War* sandbox game, so these are just quests that you access via the Legendary Lords skills tree," says Whitston. "That unlocks a sequence of missions, which culminates in one of these Quest Battles."

These Quest Battles are unique to each race, and tied into particular heroes. They're a way of introducing narrative into the *Total War* engine. "For players that are familiar with *Warhammer*, there'll be a lot of stuff in there that chimes with their knowledge," says Whitston. "For players that are new to it, it's an insight

PLAYED IT

into thousands of years of lore. Wherever possible we're keen to get not just the history of the game, but a flavor of what it's like to play the tabletop game."

This battle appears to be a quest for the Dwarf high king, Thorgrim Grudgebearer. Thorgrim's an unusual character in *Warhammer*. Most legendary heroes, like the vampire count Mannfred Von Carstein or Karl Franz, are highly mobile and can be mounted on a variety of steeds. Others, like the Dwarf Slayer King Ungrim Ironfist (who's also in this game), fight only on foot. But Thorgrim is only available mounted on a throne, carried by elite Dwarfs, like a grumpier, shorter Vitalstatistix. He's slow and tough, and best in melee, which makes him a target for enemy monsters and artillery.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Thundering Falls is actually part of the prelude for the Dwarf campaign and it introduces a totally new setting to *Total War*—underground battles. Sadly, that doesn't mean they differ particularly from surface battles; it's just a normal battle in a different locale. That said, certain units and hero abilities do get bonuses in underground battles.

The difference tunnels make is larger on the campaign map. Here armies that use the underground travel network can bypass blockages, going under armies and cities. However, they can still be intercepted by the armies en route and they have to come up for air at the end of their move. Obviously, the Dwarfs are one army that has an underground network—the Underway—as do the Skaven, the burrowing, plotting ratmen of the *Warhammer* world. And any sieges against Dwarf settlements will take place in this underground setting.

It's elements like that which show the way *Total War* has been married to *Warhammer*. Including these tunnel networks is pure *Warhammer*—but making it so armies have to surface like broken submarines, presumably in the

"WE'RE KEEN TO GET A FLAVOR OF WHAT IT'S LIKE TO PLAY THE TABLETOP GAME"

Total War: Warhammer

name of balance, is completely *Total War*. "We're not replicating Warhammer," says Al Bickham, CA's Studio communications manager, "we're putting the ideals and the paraphernalia of the tabletop game into the system we use."

DWARFS, TO ARMS!

The battle starts with us looking down on the Dwarf lines, while Thorgrim gives a speech. At the King's side is a Thane, one of the heroes who act as independent characters on the campaign map, but can join up with armies for battles.

The Dwarf playstyle is unlike the more-balanced Empire, given how slow the Dwarfs move. It's all about defense, with a huge range of cannons, volleyguns, flame cannons, handgunners, quarrellers (crossbow-dwarfs), and Irondrakes (flamer dwarfs). There are also a few infantry regiments of hardy warriors, two troops of double-handed axe-wielding Longbeards and a regiment of naked Trollslayers (who have the charming ability description "fast... for a dwarf") to fend off the enemy from getting to grips with the artillery. We're also told to expect gyrocopter reinforcements partway through the battle. These flying machines are the nearest the Dwarfs have to cavalry.

What's notably missing here is any sort of wizard. Dwarfs don't have wizards, but they do have Runesmiths—ancient, tough-as-stone anti-wizards, who engrave magic runes on weapons and armor. Also absent are the elite attack-oriented hammerers and defense-oriented ironbreakers, the miners, the rangers, the ludicrous Gyrobomber, and a few of the more boring Dwarf war machines like the bolt-thrower and stone-thrower.

Once I've arranged my units on top of an ancient Dwarfish slagheap, we start the battle. The main Orc and Goblin army starts trundling slowly towards me, while enemy units pour out from all around. It immediately has a scissors-rock-paper feel about it again. The artillery and handgunners deal with most threats, but fast units like Goblin spider riders need to be finished off by the infantry.

Once I've cleared the left and right ambushes, I get a second attack from behind by Trolls and a single Giant. The

"IF HE WASN'T AN ANNOYING LITTLE SHIT, HE WOULDN'T BE A GOBLIN"
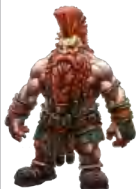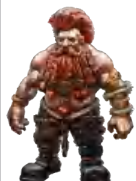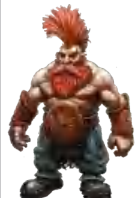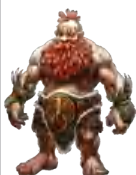
trollslayers—who are scared of nothing and specialize in killing big monsters—are the logical choice to take them down, even if they'll get wiped out in the process.

Meanwhile, my frontline is holding against the Goblin's ineffectual assaults, both ranged and melee, but their Doom Diver catapults are doing some damage to my close-packed units. Luckily, the gyrocopters have arrived. They're well suited to rapid artillery destruction, so I have them drop bombs over the massed goblin hordes as they fly by.

HEAVY LOSS

Still, I've only fended off the enemy and now the main army's upon me, complete with a Legendary goblin shaman riding a wolf, who's a nightmare to pin down despite the godrays that highlight all in-battle characters ("If he wasn't an annoying little shit, he wouldn't be a goblin," says Whitston), and an Arachnarok spider. These house-sized spiders mostly can't be hurt by non-Elite units because of their thick chitin. Only units with the armor-penetrating ability (like Thorgrim, the Thane and the Longbeards) have a good chance of taking this monster down, so I throw them in.

With my best squads tied up against a single unit, the rest of the army is in serious trouble. Orc Big Un boarboys overrun the left flank, with a few surviving trolls muddling through into the rear, dribbling trollslayers. I send the gyrocopters in for support, but goblin archers make short work of them. I lose convincingly—three times on the run actually. (I was playing on hard difficulty, before you doubt my Dwarfishness.)

The Dwarfs are a nice addition to the *Total War* universe. The sheer amount of artillery they can field means you'd have to be insane to assault them directly, but their slow movement makes it hard for them to deal with changing battlefield conditions. Their campaign mechanics make them natural allies with the Empire and natural enemies to Orcs and Skaven.

In the final game, they'll join the Orcs and Goblins, Empire and the so-far unrevealed Vampire Counts. After that, as Creative Assembly's PR manager says, "It's basically two very, very large standalone expansions, which will all bolt together to form the whole world, and there'll be free DLC and DLC drops in-between." That's several years of *Warhammer Total War* right there. It definitely dwarfs any other game.

Dan Griliopoulos
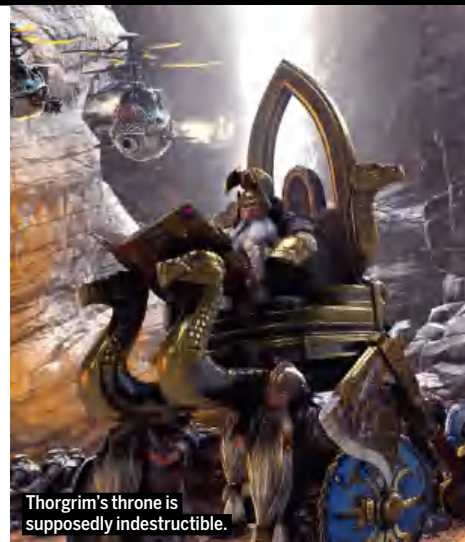
Thorgrim's throne is supposedly indestructible.
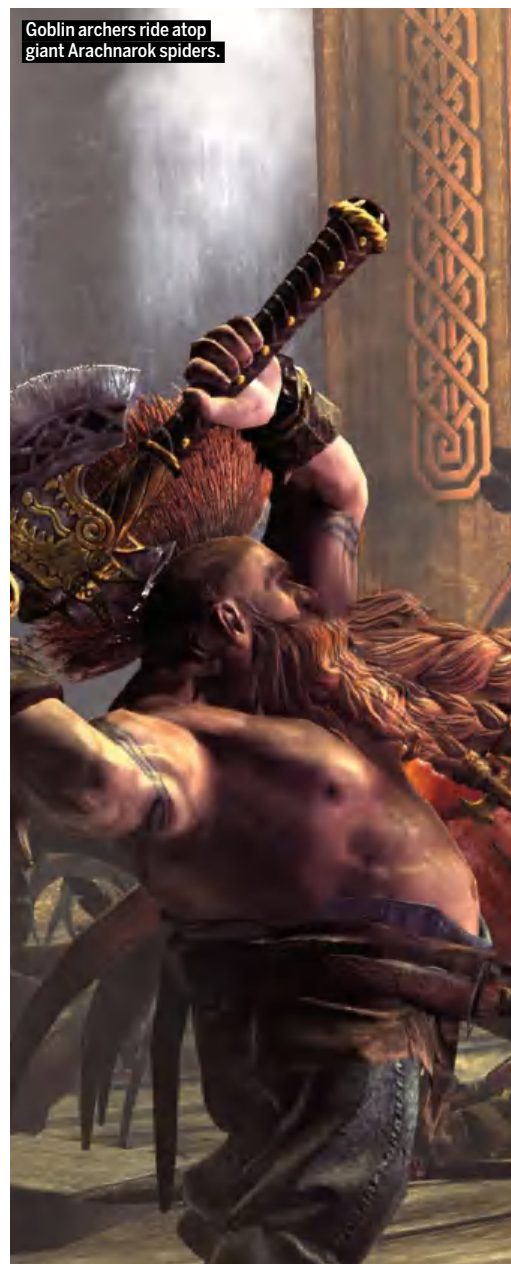
Goblin archers ride atop giant Arachnarok spiders.

The Goblins have you surrounded! Fend off that impending ambush!

Defence is the best form of attack for the slow Dwarfs.

The Thane has a magic item that debuffs the spiders.

CyberPower recommends Windows.

Windows 10

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Create The PC of Your Dreams

Cortana available in select markets at launch, experience may vary by region and device. *External monitor must support HDMI input. [If Continuum-compatible accessory is not included, add: "Accessories sold separately."] **App availability and experience varies by device and market. Office 365 subscription required for some features. ¹Limited to select premium phones at launch.
Feature and app availability and experience may vary by market and device. Windows Hello requires specialized hardware, including fingerprint reader, illuminated IR sensor or other biometric sensors.

Gamer Xtreme XT

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Need for Speed

Vanity plates like this are why you find 'asshole' sprayed on your windshield.

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	LINK
Spring 2016	Ghost Games	EA	www.needforspeed.com

NEED FOR SPEED

Drifting through EA's strange story-driven racing RPG

Welcome to the crazy world of 2015, where a *Need For Speed* game has more story than a *Metal Gear Solid* sequel. I should be more against it than I am: the word 'bae' is used twice in the first minute of the first cutscene without a trace of irony, for example, but it's actually quite a fun way to structure a game that seems to be a best-of compilation of the series.

Need For Speed's story is conveyed through live-action cutscenes that sometimes insert your own car into the background, with five supporting characters who each represent a discipline in car culture: there's speed, style, build, crew and outlaw. I played about 13% of the game over three hours and focused on the first three, which involved mainly cycling through races and drifting combos—the last two are about multiplayer and law-breaking, respectively. Each of the five ways to play is represented by a real-life icon of racing culture: racer Ken Block represents style, for example, while street racing team Risky Devil represent crew. They also sometimes feature in the background of cutscenes, to create the impression you're part of a genuine car culture. In the story, the five main fictional characters represent a different discipline, too, and they essentially function as separate quest lines.

First among that cast is Spike, an enthusiastic little brother-style character with a hat, trying to break into the racing scene. Spike seems to have rich parents and he fancies a lady called Robyn, who doesn't seem terribly interested in him. There's Amy, the no-nonsense mechanic, who I think might fancy me (the silent player character, rather than PC Gamer's Samuel Roberts). Then there's Manu, who openly mocks Spike for being a rich kid. He'd just got into some minor trouble with the police at the end of my preview.

That's about as dramatic as it gets. Each character calls you on your phone and sets up new story challenges, which then appear on the map of Ventura Bay, the game's expansive city setting. Successfully finishing a challenge earns you both experience points to build up your REP (your RPG level, basically, which gates both new challenges and car parts) and money to spend on upgrades. In my hours with the game I took a 1990 Ford Mustang from being a boring 100mph car into a 180mph beast with a blatantly tacky gold paint job. You can get a car to that point pretty fast—and there were clearly way more options deeper into the game to make it even faster. The challenges around the map are all races, time trials and drift runs (in multiplayer there are team drift challenges, too). It's an online-only game, so you'll see other players racing around and occasionally, if they're bored, ramming into you. There are some quirks that need ironing out—the characters call you so often to set up challenges in the build I played, for example, that it puts you off driving in the middle of the race, but that's apparently being scaled back for the full release.

PLAYED IT

ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Nothing's that complicated in *Need For Speed*, of course, but there's just enough depth and variety to everything here that I definitely wanted to keep developing my pig ugly Ford Mustang after playing. It's lightweight but fun, and successfully provides a framework for what might otherwise just be a grab bag of open-world challenges. Perhaps these characters could wear thin, but I think you have to take the game for what it is—it's not trying to rival *BioShock*.

Sadly, the PC build of *Need For Speed* is being released much later than console versions, in spring 2016.

Samuel Roberts

THE WORD 'BAE' IS USED TWICE IN THE FIRST MINUTE WITHOUT A TRACE OF IRONY
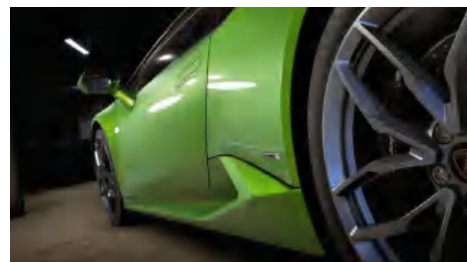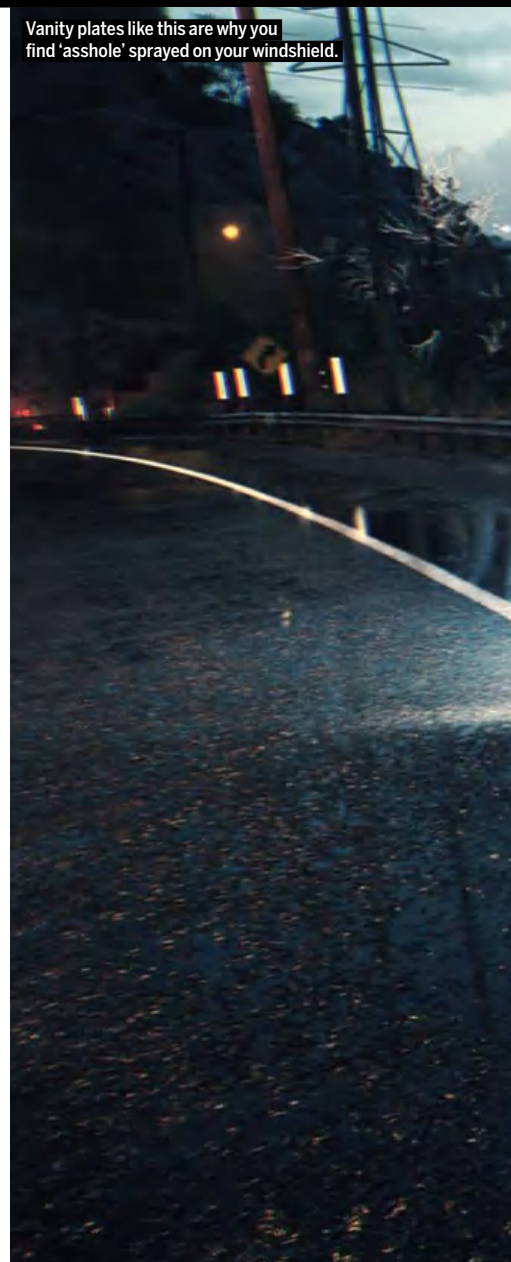
I drive a car like this (in this comic I drew).

This car is known as The Shiny One.
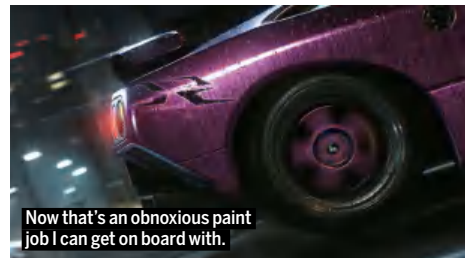
Now that's an obnoxious paint job I can get on board with.

MOUNT & BLADE 2

FIRST LOOK

Taleworlds' sandbox makes it easier to do what you want

Accessibility and difficulty aren't mutually exclusive concepts. A lack of accessibility *does* create a level of difficulty, but not necessarily an enjoyable challenge. For Taleworlds, finding the right mix of both is the key to *Warband* sequel *Mount & Blade 2*. Accessibility means a better UI that puts essential information within easy reach of the main screen.

It also means a storyline—a guided chain of quests that will introduce key features and systems. "Once they've progressed and know how to play the game," says Taleworlds' founder Armagan Yavuz, "the storyline should take a backstep and just give the player general goals and options."

Mount & Blade 2 will, like *Warband*, offer up a complex world that you can interact with in almost any way. It's a full RPG sandbox, and the improved diplomacy and combat should add extra depth to your freeform desires.
Phil Savage

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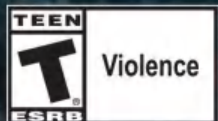
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ENDLESS SPACE 2

The expansionist strategy game is getting all introspective

The four Xs of the 4X genre each describe an outward action. Explore: you're discovering new land. Expand: you're taking that land. Exploit: you're mining that land. Exterminate: you're murdering that land's former owners. You're never asked to care about what's happening inside your empire. Your population is happy just to not be on fire.

FIRST LOOK

With *Endless Space 2*, Amplitude wants to turn the focus inward. Its citizens aren't a homogeneous blob of approval. Rather, each belongs to a distinct race, culture or political group. The team show me a mid-game scenario playing as the Sophons—*Endless Space*'s tech-focused geek squad. They're weak, fearful, and have just discovered a nearby race of world-eating machine insects. Unsurprisingly, they're terrified.

This manifests in interesting ways. They're usually a peaceful race, but support for the Sophons' militaristic faction increases in response to the new threat. It's enough to give the militarists a shot at the senate. This, it turns out, is a good thing—the laws enabled by having a militaristic party in power will be beneficial to a player facing down the unstoppable consumption of chittering robots.

The devs support the warmongers, constructing buildings that increase their reputation. Come election time, they become the majority party, and the Sophons are free to wage war.
Phil Savage

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Good luck to anyone who picks Poland.

Technology options will force military specialization.

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	LINK
TBA	Paradox	In-house	www.heartsofiron4.com

HEARTS OF IRON IV

Paradox is making World War II more accessible

Hearts of Iron IV is a game that asks 'what if?' It's a historical wargame featuring myriad ways for history to fork off into theoretical directions. What if France had declared war in response to Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland? What if Poland had become part of the Axis? What if Einstein had gone back in time to—no, wait, that was *Red Alert*.

Then there's the biggest 'what if' of all. What if Paradox took its World War II grand strategy series and tidied it up with a clean, easy to understand interface? My own attempts to play *Hearts of Iron III* have always ended in failure, thanks largely to the nested menus, mess of icons and dry, text-heavy tutorial. There's an interesting strategy game there, but it's always felt out of reach.

Hearts of Iron IV is far simpler to understand. The primary interface is the main map and even compared to Paradox's recent, more accessible grand strategies that interface has been further refined. For instance, players won't be required to switch between multiple different map overlays. Instead, 90% of the action takes place on a single, scaling map screen that contains everything from political divisions to weather and terrain.

The map shifts as you zoom in and out. At its widest level, you can see a political overview, letting you know who's in control of each region. As you zoom back in, the abstracted elements fade away and the specifics of the map emerge. It's a slick-looking system and a nice way to

transition between high-level strategy and tactical options.

There are more tactical elements to consider, and returning ones such as the time of day and weather conditions have been improved. But Paradox is keen to avoid excessive micromanagement. There are more provinces, but they're bundled into larger states, and construction is performed and managed at the state level, curtailing the busywork of production.

Every returning element has been similarly re-evaluated for size and scope—increasing the detail in some places, reducing it in others. Air superiority is a telling example: more planes are being simulated, but they're fighting over much larger zones to invoke a feeling of heroes in the skies turning the tide of battle. That wasn't possible when each skirmish was being fought in a more granular airspace.

Troop orders are also given from the map. Zoomed out, you see your units stacked together based on the states they've occupied. Zoomed in, they separate out into each of their provinces.

Unlike Paradox's other grand strategies, victory in *Hearts of Iron IV* isn't a matter of moving a huge stack of soldiers. Unit positioning is key and performed by 'painting' battle plans. These let you evenly space troops across a single front. From there, you can create arrows into enemy territory that your divisions will follow. You can also alter movement on the fly.

NEW INFO

WELL TAILORED

By simplifying the interface, Paradox has shifted the action to what makes grand strategy games exciting: the big 'what if' questions. *HoI IV* will also let the player tailor the AI's preference for historical accuracy. Historical mode ensures a computer-controlled France won't suddenly develop a fondness for fascism.

It gives you the chance to shape the war according to your own historical tweaks. Alternatively you can turn it off—plunging the world into a conflict with a less predictable outcome. *Hearts of Iron IV* may only simulate about ten years of history, but Paradox wants to fill that timespan with an enormous amount of breadth and replayability.

Phil Savage
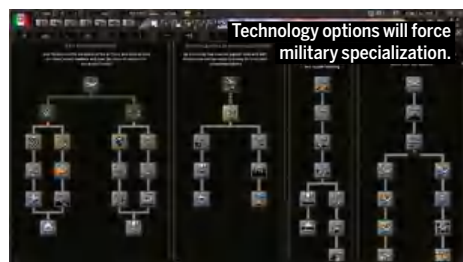
YOU CAN SHAPE THE WAR ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN HISTORICAL TWEAKS

"Korean patrol drones?
Thanks, Obama.

"I never got the call back for
Far Cry 4, so now I'm here."
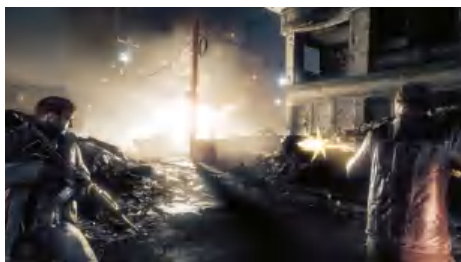
NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	LINK
2016	Deep Silver Dambuster	Deep Silver	www.bit.ly/HomeRev

HOMEFRONT THE REVOLUTION

Fight the Korean army and all-too-familiar game design

This sequel to Kaos Studios' bland 2011 FPS certainly *sounds* exciting. It's an open-world game now, and the all-new dev team describe it to me as a shooter that attempts to capture life as a guerrilla fighter. A shooter where you are outgunned and nipping at the heels of a more powerful force. A shooter where you'll need to know when to withdraw.

Sure enough, there's a moment during a scripted sequence when my panicked squadmates tell me to retreat from a fight. I do so—but only because there's an objective marker. And outside of this mission, the sense of being the underdog dissipates completely. I can wipe out patrols without fear of retribution, and capture Strike Points with ease.

Based on what I played, *Homefront: The Revolution* doesn't feel like a game about resistance fighters in a desperate struggle for freedom. It feels like an urban *Far Cry*, or a military *Watch Dogs*. Its main inspiration is not guerrilla fighters, it's the Ubisoft school of open-world design.

It's set in a Philadelphia under the control of the Korean People's Army. The map has Strike Points. Complete a Strike Point, and the camera swishes around to show nearby activities and rewards. As you complete events, the map gradually changes color to show your influence.

"The basis of it is similar to what you may have seen in other games," says senior level designer Fasahat Salim. "When you take a Strike Point and you unlock that space you get the content revealed to you, but we're not killing off the enemy. There's always an enemy presence in that space. The only thing that's changing is you now have more of a resistance influence in that space as well."

I like the sound of this approach. One of my major problems with *Far Cry 3* was that by capturing outposts, I was creating safe spaces where the enemy couldn't move. It felt as if I was slowly eroding all the fun I could have in that world. *Revolution* differs in that it won't restrict the KPA's movement—emergent patrols and events will still trigger in areas with a resistance presence.

The weapons are scrappy makeshift affairs for which many new scopes, barrels and attachments can be crafted and installed on the fly. You get toys, too. Explosives, remote hacking devices and noisemakers can be unleashed via a number of delivery mechanisms. You can attach a hacking tool to an RC car, drive it under a drone, detonate it, and watch as the drone seeks out an enemy sniper nest and self-destructs inside. It's a gimmick, but it's a good one.

ZONE FRONT

PLAYED IT

My demo takes place in a 'Red Zone'. Civilians aren't supposed to enter these bombed-out streets, so KPA patrols and snipers will shoot on sight. It's exactly the sort of setup that lends itself to the Ubisoft-style theme park. Yellow Zones sound more interesting. "It's a ghetto," Salim says. "There is a lot more population present. Security cameras are everywhere, and it's heavily policed and heavily patrolled." These areas are all about stealth, and building up support among the populace to trigger riots.

Players will also explore the Green Zone. "This is the central part of Philadelphia where all of the high-rises are," says Salim, "where you see iconic things like city hall. We wanted to create very contrasting experiences in each of the zones." These distinct areas and experiences make me hope that this is more than just a sandbox reskin. It won't be a revolution, I'm pretty sure, but combined with some accomplished combat and fun gimmicks, it could still be an entertaining shooter.

Phil Savage

ITS MAIN INSPIRATION IS THE UBISOFT SCHOOL OF OPEN-WORLD DESIGN

It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia: Season 11.

KPA stands for Korean People's Anime-men.

FIGHT THE POWER
You play Amy, lead developer Francisco Gonzalez explains. "She's working for the government when the game starts, taking part in a vaccine lottery, hoping to win. But she soon discovers that the city's rulers are hiding a secret, and fights to make things right."

LAST HOPE
Gonzalez describes his world as a cross between Alfonso Cuarón's superbly dark sci-fi Children of Men, Alan Moore's V For Vendetta, and The Hunger Games. "We're going for a bleak atmosphere, but not a completely depressing one," he explains. "There is hope in this game."

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASE	**DEVELOPER**
Spring 2016	Wadjet Eye Games
PUBLISHER	**LINK**
In-house	www.wadjeteyegames.com

SHARDLIGHT

FIRST LOOK

A struggle for survival in a disease-ridden, war-ravaged city

Wadjet Eye's fine tradition of publishing and developing old-style point-and-click adventures continues with *Shardlight*. The setting is not a cheerful one: it's a grim, desperate world torn apart by war and plague, where the divide between the rich and poor is criminally wide. The more fortunate are protected by the government, while lower class citizens struggle to survive in a dangerous wasteland, scavenging in the rubble to stay alive. It's up to you, protagonist Amy Wellard, to lead a revolution, cure the plague, and save humanity. No pressure, then. With gorgeous art by Wadjet Eye veteran Ben Chandler, *Shardlight*'s bleak world looks like a fascinating place, and I can't wait to point-and-click my way around it.
Andy Kelly

DISASTER RELIEF

"The city has been destroyed in a war, and has been slowly recovering over the past 20 years," Gonzalez says. "A new government, The Aristocracy, has emerged, and there is a class divide between the rich and poor. People are dying from a plague known as Green Lung."

DREAM TEAM

Led by Gonzalez, maker of *A Golden Wake*, the *Shardlight* team includes Ben Chandler—whose art has become synonymous with the company's games—and composer Nathaniel Chambers. Another artist, Ivan Ulyanov, provides the character portraits for dialogue.

MORE THAN HUMAN

Jensen's back, and he's more powerful than ever in
DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

By Tom Senior

The scope tags enemies, making them easy to track.

LAST RESORT
This theater in Prague is a hideout for a criminal gang. Augs rejected by society find a safe haven in the criminal underworld.

Deep in a theater in rainy Prague, bionic commando Adam Jensen is trapped in a closet. The door is the only exit, and that's guarded by a bipedal robot loaded up with machine guns. There must be a way out; *Deus Ex* is all about choice.

I search for a vent, because there's always a vent. But with the exception of a big bin, the room is empty. I have fled into the most featureless and poorly ventilated space in the *Deus Ex* universe. I consider my abilities: my electric dash will get me killed slightly faster than ambling into fire. Cloaking isn't going to help either. I press a button to bring up my gun. From here you can switch ammo types, add silencers and tweak your scope. No armor-piercing rounds. Damn.

A frag grenade! Robots hate frag grenades. I open the door, toss the egg and close it again as the robot opens fire. WHUMP. I use my augmented vision mode to see through the wall and spot the robot lying still on its side. I crack the door. There's a terrible whirring noise. The robot stirs, righting itself in a hideous tangle of legs. It's not dead. It's not dead at all.

I retreat into the room. This is Adam Jensen's life now, this room. It's an incongruous end for a man who has dedicated the two years since the events of *Human Revolution* to becoming the perfect walking weapon. *Human Revolution* Jensen was the improvised, slightly buggy prototype who could only punch two people before having to recharge his batteries. *Mankind Divided* Jensen is colder, harder and deadlier. Eidos Montreal refer to him as Jensen 2.0.

SERIAL KILLER
Jensen 2.0 has just come up with a very stupid plan. With the right upgrades Jensen can lift huge objects, like the massive bin sitting in the corner. I open the door and grab the fridge-sized object, hugging it against my belly for dear life. The robot opens fire, and the bin soaks up the bullets—it's working! I bump the robot backwards. The robot's guns fire point blank into the bin as we perform an absurd rotating waltz into
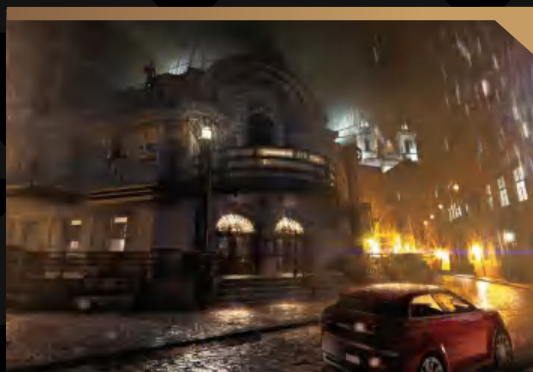
In 2029, all buildings will be made of triangles.

the corridor. I'm a genius. I silently thank Prague council's commitment to bin sturdiness and slowly back away. I make it five steps before the bin breaks. I'm an idiot.

I'm also dead, but laughing. In *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided*, even a tiny and almost featureless room can create moments of emergent absurdity. "That's exactly the kind of story that we look for," gameplay director Patrick Fortier tells me. "We really believe in the strength of spontaneous moments. They're really powerful, and we believe that they're as exciting for players as the big scripted moments."

I'm inclined to agree, and happy to discover that *Mankind Divided* is a solid continuation of the *Human Revolution* formula. In *Mankind Divided* Jensen flies all over the world as a special forces expert working for the *Deus Ex* equivalent of Interpol. The world is still reeling from *Human Revolution*'s techno-virus outbreak that turned augmented individuals into frenzied cyborg killers. Now augmented people are oppressed, segregated and treated as an underclass in what Eidos Montreal awkwardly refer to as a "mechanical apartheid". Jensen wants to track down the Illuminati members responsible for the state of the world, and punch them with his big metal hands. As executive narrative director Mary DeMarle puts it: "he wants to meet the puppeteer, he doesn't want to just be the puppet anymore."

Mankind Divided will play out over a collection of hub zones, although Eidos Montreal hasn't confirmed how many yet. The Prague level I explored takes place in one corner of a sizeable area—roughly two or three city blocks in size. The rest of the zone was locked off so I couldn't explore first-hand, but the new hubs will be more populated and detailed than *Human Revolution*'s, thanks in large part to *Mankind Divided*'s new engine.

"It's definitely a bigger monster than *Human Revolution* was," says audio director Steve Szczepkowski. "In *Human Revolution* we could put maybe twelve people on screen that were moving, and then maybe another six static that would just sit and do their occupation. Well, that's doubled." The amount of dialogue has grown as a result. "I don't remember what the total actor count is, but I know we're already way over a hundred. And that's with unique characters and all the

CAUGHT IN THE BREEZE
The new engine means the developers can build far more complicated, curvy environments packed with moving elements. In Dubai, hanging materials flap in the wind—a big improvement on *Human Revolution*'s static, boxy streets.

factions we have so there's a lot of voices. We've done a lot for the acting economy here in Montreal."

STAGE MANAGED

Games like *Metal Gear Solid V* have changed our assumptions about what emergent sandbox games can be, but *Deus Ex* is about density rather than size. The Prague theater is a warren, and there are plenty of ways in. You can climb in through a window into an office protected by a laser grid. Going left leads you to a couple of ladders that get you to the roof. There's a vent there that drops you right into the bowels of the building. Go right and there's a moving platform that you can activate using a biocell, the biological batteries used to recharge Jensen's abilities. I used this platform to get a huge box onto a ledge, which I then jumped on to find a second way onto the roof. You can even enter through the beautiful glass dome on top of the theater. Alternatively, if you want to test your guns, just walk in through the front door.

The level of detail far exceeds *Human Revolution,* which always felt constrained by its engine. There's stuff to pick up and throw everywhere, which means I get to find out how guard robots respond to being hit with

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JENSEN'S ELBOW CHISELS CAN NOW BE FIRED AT ENEMIES

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a traffic cone (they don't like it). The streets are dark, rainy and atmospheric. I lure the poor robot down to a grimy public toilet where it sets off an EMP mine I planted earlier. I leave it collapsed just outside the gents, but just have time to admire how grotty the place feels. *Human Revolution*'s gold filter is gone, which frees the theater's lavish interiors to feel substantially different to the grimy city streets.

This artful clutter gives Eidos Montreal more ways to teach you about the world. You can hack into terminals to read emails and pick up news-pads, of course, but I also found a TV in the Prague level that showed a full length news report presented by *Human Revolution*'s news anchor, Eliza Cassan. If you know the truth about Eliza from *Human Revolution,* you might sense just a little bias in her reporting.

The leap in world fidelity means more graffiti, newspaper front pages that blow around the streets, and more detailed books, posters and road signs. It's a richer place, and full of neat designs for weapons, robots and augmentations. Company logos and clothes subtly play on the recurring tessellated triangles motif of *Human Revolution,* and there's a signature elegance to the technology. I couldn't

stop looking at Jensen's arms—dark and tightly coiled, like armored vipers.

Those arms can do marvellous things, and Prague is a great playground for Jensen's new abilities. As in *Human Revolution,* he can cloak. He can use an aug that helps him to move silently. Titan armor can deflect bullets for a time. His close-combat retractable elbow chisels can now be fired at enemies. His knuckles can deploy

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TRESPASSING 2.0
Infiltrate anything, **Deus Ex** *style*

IS THERE A VENT?

YES → NO

IS THERE A CRATE?

YES → NO

IS THERE ANOTHER CRATE? → **THERE'S A TERMINAL**

YES → NO

STACK THEM TO REACH A WINDOW → **THROW THE CRATE THROUGH A WINDOW** → **HACK THAT**

JOB DONE!

DEATH IN DUBAI
Dubai has been devastated by the aug virus incident. Jensen travels there to meet an informant, and ends up entangled in an arms deal as a sandstorm blasts the city.

multiple homing electrical shock bolts to a group of guards. Jensen is a heavily militarized Inspector Gadget, and feels remarkably powerful.

The power trip is sustained by a redesigned energy system. No longer are you constrained to a handful of energy pips. Instead, you have a bar of energy that depletes a little every time you activate an ability. For continuous abilities such as cloak, the remaining bar will gradually drain as you remain invisible. Energy used sustaining continuous abilities conveniently recharges, but the initial energy chunk you blow on ability activation can only be restored with a biocell.

AUGS AUGMENTED

With more juice, you can chain abilities together into monstrously satisfying combos. I used my Icarus dash to leap into the middle of a group of guards, and then immediately deployed my typhoon attack. The camera popped into third person and Jensen spun, shedding a spray of miniature warheads from his arms. You can combine abilities simultaneously with good results. Activate your silent feet aug and then dash, and you can quickly and silently close in for a close combat KO, for example. Close combat attacks still pop you into third-person view for a brutal miniature cutscene—Jensen has learned an especially handsome uppercut since *Human Revolution*.

Mankind Divided's augmentations have been redesigned to solve a key issue with the first game, where choosing a stealthy, non-lethal approach mostly prevented you from using the game's loudest and coolest toys. *Mankind Divided* tackles this by giving augmentations multiple functions, and non-lethal variants when necessary. If you choose, the typhoon attack can fire a spray of green gas bombs that incapacitate guards without killing them.

"Every time we add new augmentations we try to see how versatile they can be," says Fortier. "Even something like the nano-blade—which thematically is more offensive because it's a blade—you can still use it as a distraction as well, if you want to maintain stealth. We're trying to think

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

about augmentations in that way, that they can serve multi-purposes."

I still haven't found a clever second use for the amazing shock-blast, however. *Human Revolution*'s PEPS gun is now built into Jensen's arm. Firing it hits the area in front of you with a massive concussive shockwave that sends enemies and any nearby detritus flying. It's *Deus Ex*'s equivalent of *Skyrim*'s Fus Ro Dah dragon shout. The Icarus landing system also returns, cushioning long drops with a deeply satisfying golden electric forcefield. If you tap as you fall Jensen releases the forcefield as a destructive blast.

If you prefer a more subtle approach, try the hacking game. Cracking a complex device like a workstation sends you into a familiar minigame in which you capture nodes on a web. Each node you seize carries the chance of activating a countermeasure system that races to turn nodes red before you can take control of the device. Bonus nodes grant you extra currency and hacking power-ups, adding a fun element of risk-reward brinkmanship.

DEHACKTIVATE
With the right upgrades you can also hack smaller devices such as security cameras quickly and at range. Jensen makes a safe-cracking gesture at the target and a box appears showing a soundwave with several spikes, and a line moving rapidly from left to right. As the line moves over the spikes, you can tap to remove them all and activate a disruptive affect. A range-hacked camera shuts down. A hacked security robot is temporarily disabled. The

minigame is basic, but it turns hacking into an offensive tool that you can use in the middle of a gunfight. It speaks to the evolved philosophy of the sequel, which says that whether you opt to play loudly, quietly, lethally or non-lethally, most of *Mankind Divided*'s tools should be useful to you.

Even the core movement and cover systems have been refined. You can now dash a short distance from cover. The distance of the dash is indicated by a faint line. If it touches another point of shelter, a faint outline of Jensen shows that you'll snap into cover at your new location. You can also dash into open ground to quickly close with an enemy, or make a hasty dash to a ladder or a vent without being spotted. It minimizes the amount of time you spend slowly squat-stalking guards and makes stealth movement faster and more decisive.

Mankind Divided feels familiar, but from the cover system to the new augs, almost every system has been touched up. The result is a sleek power fantasy with enough sandbox freedom to let you own your anecdotes. I still have plenty of stories from my hours in Prague. I threw a sniper off his rooftop perch at the guards below, stole his rifle and cleared out the lobby from the streets. I've distracted guards with a traffic cone and walked right around them, invisible. All this in one small corner of the game. There's still plenty more to discover about the story and the conversation systems, but *Mankind Divided* is a few months of polish away from being another great *Deus Ex*. We definitely asked for this. ■

THE PEPS SHOCK-BLAST IS *DEUS EX*'S "FUS RO DAH"

HUMAN EVOLUTION
Adam Jensen's fanciest upgrades

1 HAIR 2.0 Augmented with gel product. Keeps Jensen catwalk-ready.

2 SHADES 2.0 Buffs coolness outdoors. Debuffs coolness indoors.

3 JACKET 2.0 Gets Jensen into nicer parties. Smells faintly of flowers.

4 SYMBOLISM 2.0 Icarus wings follow Jensen everywhere.

5 HANDS 2.0 Retractable fist chisels that can pin men to walls.

6 KNEES 2.0 Reinforced calves for extended crouch-walking.

THE

30

BEST GTA V MODS

Liven up Los Santos with Reapers, time travel and flying cars.

By Tom Hatfield

S ince the beginning of time (the '80s) PC gamers have sought to change or modify their games. And since the days of *San Andreas, Grand Theft Auto* has always had an impressive modding scene. For *GTA V,* the quality bar has been set incredibly high after only six months—just look at the amazing creations we're bringing you in this feature.

Just one word of warning. While Rockstar hasn't made a comprehensive statement about its policy on mods, it has said it will ban anyone taking mods online—a method of preventing cheating in *GTA Online*. I recommend uninstalling any mods before venturing online, just in case you set one off by mistake and get banned. You have been warned.

STAR DESTROYER

JJxOracle seems to have something against blimps, because this modder has created not one, but two mods dedicated to replacing them. This release gives you enormous Star Destroyers floating over the city. It's not quite the kilometer-long behemoth that Star Wars canon dictates, but it's still impressively huge. Unfortunately this is not compatible with the Reaper mod, as the two replace the same model. So you can't make them fight to the death, more's the pity.
www.bit.ly/1Lrgj1K

SIMPLE PASSENGER SCRIPT

Ever wanted to hitchhike in *GTA*? This mod enables you to climb aboard vehicles as a passenger, and set waypoints for the curiously cooperative driver to follow. You can even execute drive-bys as a passenger, although not all drivers are happy about that.
www.bit.ly/1KvBquE

THE RED HOUSE

I can't imagine anyone feeling that *GTA V* doesn't have enough 'content' for their needs, but if you do then *The Red House* is exactly what you want. This pack adds 20+ new missions and a full three-stage heist, including AI bodyguards to back you up while you take them on.
www.bit.ly/1iItEYu

HOW TO INSTALL

GTA V mods are, unfortunately, not particularly easy to install. Rockstar has offered little in the way of mod tools, so the community has been obliged to hack together several solutions of its own. While each mod link should explain how to install the mod itself, several of them have prerequisites.

OPENIV
This is used to open up files within *GTA V* and swap models. Fun fact: it's called OpenIV because it was originally developed for *GTA IV*. It's wise to backup your game files before using it.
www.openiv.com

MAP EDITOR
Any mod that adds new areas to the San Andreas map requires the map editor to work.
www.bit.ly/1NOneUy

SCRIPT HOOK V
If you want to change behavior in a game rather than just change how something looks, you'll need Alexander Blade's Script Hook utility. It also comes with NativeTrainer, which lets you use all sorts of cheats in singleplayer. Some mods will require you to install the .net extension for script hook, or the LUA plugin.

Script Hook—www.bit.ly/1J0pPVB
.net Script Hook—www.bit.ly/1FXo3lS
LUA plugin—www.bit.ly/1ef2OVk

The 30 Best GTA V Mods

SINGLEPLAYER SNOW

For those who want something a little more Christmassy than the traditional *GTA V*, this mod covers San Andreas in a fine blanket of snow. It's called *Singleplayer Snow* because there is also a *GTA Online* version of the mod, but I don't recommend using that until Rockstar clearly explains its policy regarding mods and *GTA Online*.
www.bit.ly/1OKUXxk

CUSTOM NUMBER PLATE

Only vacuous, egotistical nonentities spend money on personalized number plates, but since that's who you play in *GTA*, this script makes a lot of sense. Simply get in a car, hit a key, and type whatever you want. Now you can finally put 'l33t' or 'b00bs' on the front of your million dollar sports vehicle.
www.bit.ly/1j2E0SZ

FIRE BREATHER

This is the fire breather mod. It enables your character to breath fire. It also works if you've used a trainer to transform yourself into a dog, which means you can play as a fire-breathing dog. Curiously, the mod does not make you fireproof. Caution is advised when traveling forward into your own flames.
www.bit.ly/1QsZqDm

ARMY AT FIVE STARS

In past *GTA* games, achieving the highest wanted level resulted in the army being unleashed to hunt you down. This isn't the case in *GTA V*. The worst opposition you'll ever face is a SWAT team and the FIB. This mod lets the army join the chase again, coincidentally giving the player a better chance to hijack military vehicles.
www.bit.ly/1KqrgP3

GTA RPG

This massive mod turns *GTA V* from a sandbox criminal shooter into a more traditional sandbox RPG. It adds dialogue trees, character customization, level ups and perks. Don't expect BioWare levels of choice, but it does make the game feel more like something made by Ubisoft or Bethesda.
www.bit.ly/1LrhPAV

NO WATER + TSUNAMI + ATLANTIS

This mod lets you manipulate sea level until the entire city of Los Santos is under the waves. Alternatively you can lower it until you can walk or drive on the dry seabed and see what secrets Rockstar has hidden there.
www.bit.ly/1HbtcM7

POLICE MOD

In previous *GTA* games jumping into a police car enabled the player to start 'vigilante missions' based on stopping crimes and tracking down criminals. Sadly these weren't included in *GTA V,* but *Police Mod* offers something similar. By using a script you can reskin yourself as a police officer, spawn a cop car and a partner and listen-in on the police radio, responding to high speed chases and shootouts.
www.bit.ly/1gG1SKt
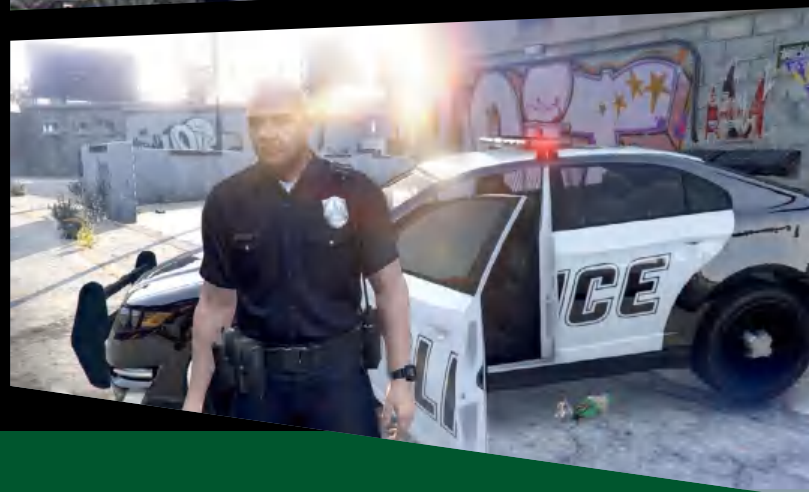
VIRTUAL REALITY

GTA V doesn't support VR natively, but with the help of a third-party program called VorpX you can cobble together a rough VR version for your Oculus Rift. You'll also need to install the FoV fix to get this working properly, otherwise you're likely to end up feeling sick. You might end up feeling sick anyway.
VorpX—www.bit.ly/1L0zmS2
Tutorial—www.bit.ly/1OKTdV0

OPEN ALL INTERIORS

During the course of *GTA V*'s story you're given access to a whole host of buildings that are usually locked in free mode. This mod unlocks them permanently so you can pop into the Life Invader offices or Humane Labs to mess things up any time you feel like. It even adds several interiors that were cut from the original game, which modders later found lying around in the game files.
www.bit.ly/1V5oUYA

The 30 Best GTA V Mods

MOBILE RADIO

Their sledgehammer satire can become wearisome, but the music is great. Ever wanted to listen to *GTA V's* numerous radio stations while on foot? Well now you can! This script adds a radio function to your mobile phone, enabling you to plug in the earbuds (figuratively speaking, there's no animation) and enjoy your tunes on the go.
www.bit.ly/1LrhEFK

REAPER

This visually impressive mod by JJxOracle replaces the blimps flying around San Andreas with a Reaper from *Mass Effect*. The result is to offset *GTA V's* manic crim sim with a note of impending eldritch horror. Sadly you cannot ASSUME DIRECT CONTROL of this colossal beast, it just floats there looking vaguely menacing. Don't fear the Reaper, just enjoy it.
www.bit.ly/1KudMzA

BACK TO THE FUTURE DELOREAN

This is actually two mods, working in harmony. The first adds a lovingly detailed model of the DeLorean from Back to the Future to the game. The second actually lets it travel in time. Sadly this does not close the game down and load up *Vice City* (missed a trick, there), but instead adds a flashy explosion effect once you punch in a date and hit 88 miles per hour.
Model—www.bit.ly/1YuAXTZ
Time Travel—www.bit.ly/1isHIom

GRAPPLING HOOK

This mod adds a grappling hook gun based on the one from *Just Cause*. You can use it for regular old fashioned grappling, or you can hold down the aim key and attach it to two targets, bungeeing them together. Modder JulioNIB says he hopes to add the ability to steal vehicles you've grappled onto.

www.bit.ly/1LId81j

VEHICLE CANNON

You'd expect a mod called 'vehicle cannon' to be a cannon that attaches to your vehicle. That would be the sensible option, but *GTA* mods are rarely sensible. Instead this gives you a cannon that fires vehicles, replacing all your bullets with random, full sized cars. This understandably destroys any chance to play the game remotely seriously, but makes for a good laugh.

www.bit.ly/1FphX2K

GRAVITY GUN SCRIPT

Gordon's Second Law states that every game is improved immeasurably by the inclusion of a gravity gun. This script replacing *GTA V*'s taser with a fully functional *Half-Life 2* zero point emitter proves it. You can pick up objects, including cars and even pedestrians, and shoot them off into the sunset.

www.bit.ly/1FaBwfB

CRIME AND POLICE REBALANCE

This makes a ton of cool tweaks to the way police respond to crimes. In particular, crimes now typically require a witness to call 911 in order to trigger a wanted level, making it much easier to kill someone silently and stealthily.

www.bit.ly/1KGiOtv

FOV MOD

Ah, field of view. Incredibly important to some people, an afterthought to others. Whether you are one of those who holds it to be a precious human liberty for which our ancestors fought, or merely someone who is prone to motion sickness, this is the mod for you. It's also a prerequisite for the VR mod.

www.bit.ly/1V5x0pt

ICENHANCER

The original *ICEnhancer* was an ENB-based mod (read: that mod that makes *Skyrim* look super nice) that appeared towards the end of *GTA IV*'s lifespan. Its enhanced shaders gave the game an enormous graphical upgrade. The good news is that the same people are working on a version for *GTA V*. The bad news is that it's still very much a work in progress.

www.icelaglace.com

The 30 Best GTA V Mods

CAR JETPACKS

Flying cars! Lazy joke about how we were all promised flying cars in the 1950s! Anyway, while we didn't get flying cars we did get giant virtual crime sandboxes, which is probably a fair trade in the long run. Especially as we can now put flying cars in our giant virtual crime sandboxes, with the aid of this mod. Huzzah!
www.bit.ly/1QT6hGX

LUXURY SAFEHOUSE

GTA V's luxury houses are pretty nice, but modder Sanghelios wanted something a little bigger. OK, a lot bigger. This ridiculous bachelor pad near Fort Zancudo boasts 30 parking spots, three helipads and its own private runway. It's so impressive the paparazzi hang out in the parking lot taking pictures.
www.bit.ly/1gG3Jih

RAILROAD ENGINEER

You've seen *GTA V*'s trains circling around the map. Perhaps you've even jumped aboard and taken a ride on one. But if you want to actually drive a train you'll need *Railroad Engineer*, which lets you take over both the freight train and commuter trams. You can even steer them off the tracks for a massive crash.
www.bit.ly/1isHBZT

VEHICLE CONTROLLER SCRIPT

This neat little script adds a whole bunch of new controls for driving a car, enabling you to pop the hood, use your indicators, wind down windows and a million other meaningless little cosmetic tricks. It provides a few practical extras too, such as being able to leave the engine running on your getaway car or hit cruise control on the highway.
www.bit.ly/1YuCiKn

RAVEN ROCK

Raven Rock adds a whole new island to the northeast of the *GTA V* map. This island sports an absolutely massive military base with two helipads, a runway, a submarine and a secret underwater tunnel. It's one of the most impressive 'new location' mods I've seen, well worth installing the map editor for.
www.bit.ly/1WdgX6i

NICE FLY

There's a lot of ways to fly in this feature, whether it be by donning Hulkbuster armor or strapping a jetpack to your car. For the purists, however, this mod offers the chance to take to the sky unaided. Ironically it is necessary to equip a parachute to use it, even though you'll never actually need one again.
www.bit.ly/1gG3LGW

IRON MAN AND HULKBUSTER ARMOR

Modder JulioNIB seems to be a bit of a Tony Stark fan. He's made multiple versions of this mod so far, featuring different kinds of Iron Man armor. My favorite is the Hulkbuster armor, as seen in Avengers: Age of Ultron. Wearing it gives the wearer all sorts of cool powers, including flight, repulsor blasts and the strength to throw cars around with ease. (Hulk not included.)

www.bit.ly/1KvBeLT
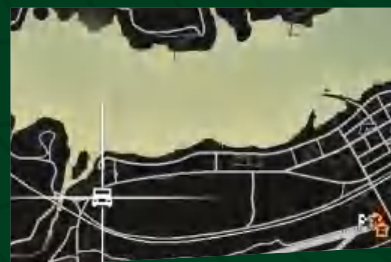
TRUCKING MISSIONS

We love a bit of *Truck Simulator* here at PCG, and relish the opportunity to do a little relaxed cargo hauling across the wonderful San Andreas landscape. Simply go to the trucking office in Sandy Shores and sign up to haul cargo for everyone from Simeon to the US government. Some people want a fast delivery, others want their truck intact.

www.bit.ly/1KvBhYe

NORTH YANKTON LOADER

*GTA V*s prologue takes place far from Los Santos, in the chilly snowbound climes of North Yankton. This mod allows you to revisit the area and roam about freely, offering a nice change of pace from the sunny state of San Andreas. There's nobody there (unless you spawn them with a trainer) but it's an impressively large chunk of town for such a brief appearance in the game.

www.bit.ly/1isIUIh

DEEP TROUBLE

Plumb the depths of **SOMA**, a new horror game from
the creators of *Amnesia*. *By Andy Kelly*

SOMA is a deadly game of hide and seek played against a parade of increasingly bizarre mechanized monsters. You have to make it from one end of underwater facility Pathos-II to the other without being killed. Along the way you learn about the base, the experiments going on there, and what happened to its mysteriously absent employees. It's a basic horror game at its core, but elevated by a compelling story and an evocative setting.

The view is first-person, and you interact with the world in a brilliantly physical way. Click on a door to grab it, then push with the mouse to shove it open. Click to take hold of a switch, then pull back to yank it down. Anyone who played *Amnesia* will be familiar with this. Everything you touch, push, pull, and pick up feels heavy, tangible. There are no weapons, gadgets, or tools to help you, and you can't fight back. All you can do is run and hide. It's a resolutely minimalist game, but with lavish production values that make it feel much richer than it really is.

I can't say who you are, or why Pathos-II is in such a mess, because both represent the backbone of the plot. It's a game of slow revelation. You, like the protagonist, are completely clueless at the beginning. You don't know why you're there, why it's crawling with murderous machines, or where everyone is. But the truth is drip-fed over time, until the reality of your situation hits you like a brick. It's a wonderfully told, and written, story. It compels you to keep pushing on through the darkness, with shock moments that make you rethink everything preceding them.

Machinery seems to be *eating* the world around you

ACTING OUT
Amateurish voice acting is the only sore point. The main character, Simon, never sounds particularly bothered by anything happening to him, including a mid-game twist that would send anyone into shock. Honestly, I don't like or care about him that much, which diminishes the fear factor. The supporting cast are a mixed bag, but largely just as unconvincing. Catherine, who acts as your guide for much of the game, is the only character I really felt a connection

with, and her tragic story lingered with me long after I'd finished the game. But it's testament to the quality of the world-building and writing that, although sometimes distracting, the inconsistent performances are never enough to make you stop believing in what's happening.

For me, the highlight of the game is Pathos-II itself. The best storytelling is found in the environments, not the characters. Located at the bottom of the ocean, it's Rapture meets the Nostromo. Its claustrophobic, labyrinthine metal corridors are straight out of the 1970s handbook of hard sci-fi set design, and it's absolutely drenched in atmosphere. Flickering lights, burst pipes, leaky bulkheads, and a strange, black goo seeping through cracks in the walls are constant reminders that this place is seriously broken. The story takes you on a tour of different parts of the base, and they all have a distinct look and feel.

LIGHT SHOW
The lighting is fantastic, making you forever wary of what horrors lurk in shadowy corners. You see peculiar, almost organic machinery dotted with glowing lights—like something out of an HR Giger drawing—that seems to be *eating* the world around you. Visually, it's a masterpiece, and every room tells a story: about the people who lived there, about what went wrong, about the outside world, or about yourself. Your character has the ability to touch certain things, including dead bodies and broken robots, and hear fragmented memories that reveal richly painted stories about the base and its inhabitants before its collapse. It's a setting that's infused with hand-crafted detail.

While there are plenty of slow moments where you explore the base and learn about its purpose, it's when the monsters arrive that *SOMA* enters more familiar territory. Its cast of robotic stalkers is varied, but their AI is rudimentary. Compared to the

FEAR FACTOR

A typical relationship with a monster in **SOMA**

FEAR

Terrified

Unshaken

TIME

Holy crap, what is THAT?

Argh! Run away!

Oh, I've just died.

Dead again. And again.

Seriously, dude?

deep sigh

That's not even the worst thing you'll see.

You get to ride on this.

These things restore your health.

Clutter makes the world feel believably lived-in.
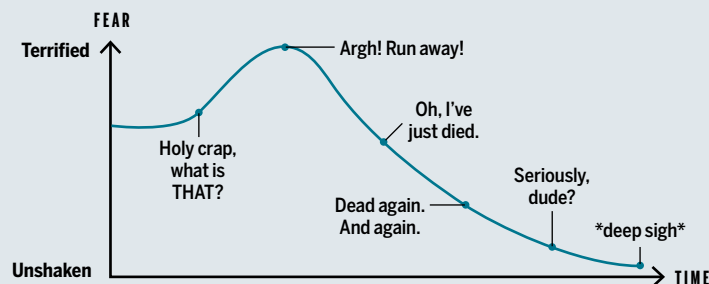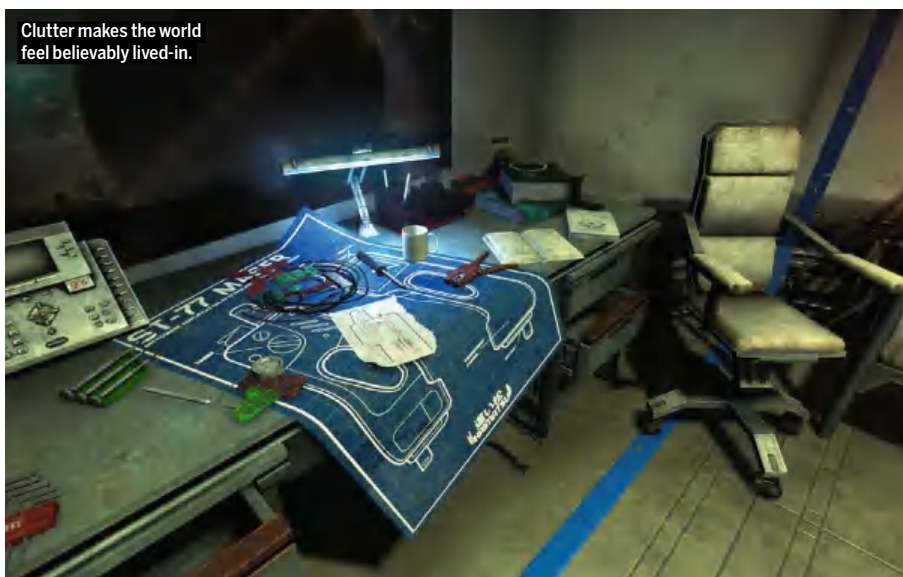
Soma

It looks like a robot, but is it?

These chairs play an important role.
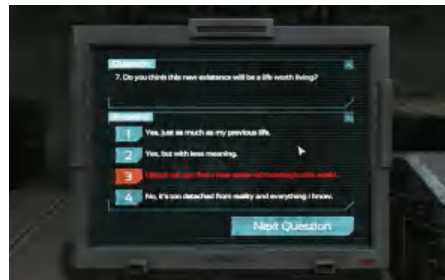
Catherine knows the base inside out.

This device is used in one brief sequence.

The environment art is amazing.

» dynamic, unpredictable predator in *Alien: Isolation,* these guys just seem to pace back and forth, waiting for you to mess up and stumble into their field of vision. You don't feel you're being hunted by an unknowable evil: more like you're trying to sneak past a security guard—albeit one made of wires and severed body parts.

They're scary at first. You only ever catch glimpses of them in the shadows, which makes them more terrifying. Your mind fills in the blanks, which is always more effective. The screen glitches and distorts as they approach. They make horrifying sounds: screeching, rasping, and ranting about 'black blood' in garbled machine-voices. My favorite, who I've lovingly nicknamed Disco Man, has a head made of blinking lights that make the screen flicker crazily if you look directly at him. This adds an interesting dynamic to sneaking around him in the cramped confines of a shipwreck, as you can never fully look at him to gauge his movement.

But the monsters' initial impact never lasts. When they attack, you lose a life and get sent back in time to just before they spotted you, giving you a chance to correct your mistake. The more this happens, the glitchier the screen gets, and you eventually start limping. Get caught too many times and it's game over and back to the last checkpoint—and these are generously distributed, to be fair. But in the sections where you die repeatedly, you end up no longer scared of your pursuer, just frustrated by it. As I said earlier, it's no more complicated than hide and seek. I ended up dreading the arrival of a monster, not because it was scary, but because it meant more trial-and-error stealth—and less time poking around those wonderful environments.

Occasionally you leave the confines of the base and wander the sea floor. These large open areas are a nice change of pace from the narrow metal corridors, and feature some of the game's prettiest visuals. Some of these sections require you to dodge the roving spotlights of killer robots, but at other times they offer (ironically enough) some breathing space. I spent a good while just wandering around watching shoals of fish and sea turtles swim past, putting

INSPIRED *The sci-fi DNA of* SOMA

ALIEN
Dark, industrial horror in an atmospheric and isolated setting.

I, ROBOT
Explores the morality of creating artificial intelligence.

GHOST IN THE SHELL
Digital people inhabiting machine bodies.

NEUROMANCER
Artificial intelligence breaking free from its limitations.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY
Cold, hard sci-fi and a rogue AI.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA
Sentient machines turn on their creators.

THE THING
A remote base stricken by an unknowable, powerful force.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
A villainous AI that uses people as avatars.

off venturing into the next dark and dingy corner of the base. A level set on a sunken, barnacle-covered ship also offers some variety, and its twisting, cramped tunnels are genuinely nerve-racking.

SOMA does, at times, fall into the trap that a lot of sci-fi horror games do—including *Alien: Isolation* and *Dead Space*—where many of the objectives boil down to just fixing things. There are power generators that need to be powered up, flooded rooms to flush, switches to pull, quarantines to lift, and other odd jobs. And, naturally, many of these involve venturing into the deepest, darkest corners of the base and dodging roaming monsters as you hunt desperately for the right button to press or computer to access.

> ### *SOMA* has big, interesting ideas when it comes to story and themes

PANIC ROOM

While some of its scares are predictable—especially when Catherine sends you down into any kind of basement—there are moments of brilliantly paced, carefully crafted horror that will catch you off guard. Sometimes the screen will glitch, heralding the arrival of a monster, but none will arrive—a cruel, clever way of keeping you on your toes. One of the best set-pieces forces you to suddenly retrace your steps through a particularly dark, claustrophobic level with a monster in pursuit.

But mostly the scares come in the form of monsters waddling around in dark spaces, in front of doors or switches that you have to access. These are effective in small bursts, especially if you're playing in the dark

with headphones, but it's a kind of horror that I've experienced many times before in games.

It's a curious combination: rote hide and seek horror, tied to a game with an intelligent, thoughtful story that reaches beyond the bounds of its own narrative. In this universe, people have found a way to make digital copies of themselves—their memories, personalities, flaws—and transfer them into machines. *SOMA* asks questions about the nature of humanity. It has things to say about free will, individuality, and morality. It makes you *think*—which makes the bits where you're being chased around in the dark by a mechanical monster all the more jarring.

SOMA has big, interesting ideas when it comes to story and themes, but this ambition and imagination doesn't carry over into its game design. Yet, monster encounters aside, this stricken underwater base is one of the most fascinating, atmospheric spaces I've ever explored in a game. There's all manner of horrific imagery down in those murky depths to be discovered, and the story is unsettling. In this sense, it's a great horror game. It affects you psychologically and emotionally—often in a subtle, understated way. But all this does is highlight how ineffectual its more familiar attempts to scare are. Ultimately, it's what's inside your head that scares you in *SOMA*, not what's in front of you. ■

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

A masterpiece of audio and visual design, *SOMA* is atmospheric, cerebral, and occasionally frustrating.

80

Undertale

Monsters are generally lovely. You racist.

And now, a story of how happy I am not to be murdered.

* You wander through the caverns, attacking anyone in your path.

Papyrus is a great font of wisdom.

YOU MUST CARE ABOUT PUZZLES LIKE I DO!
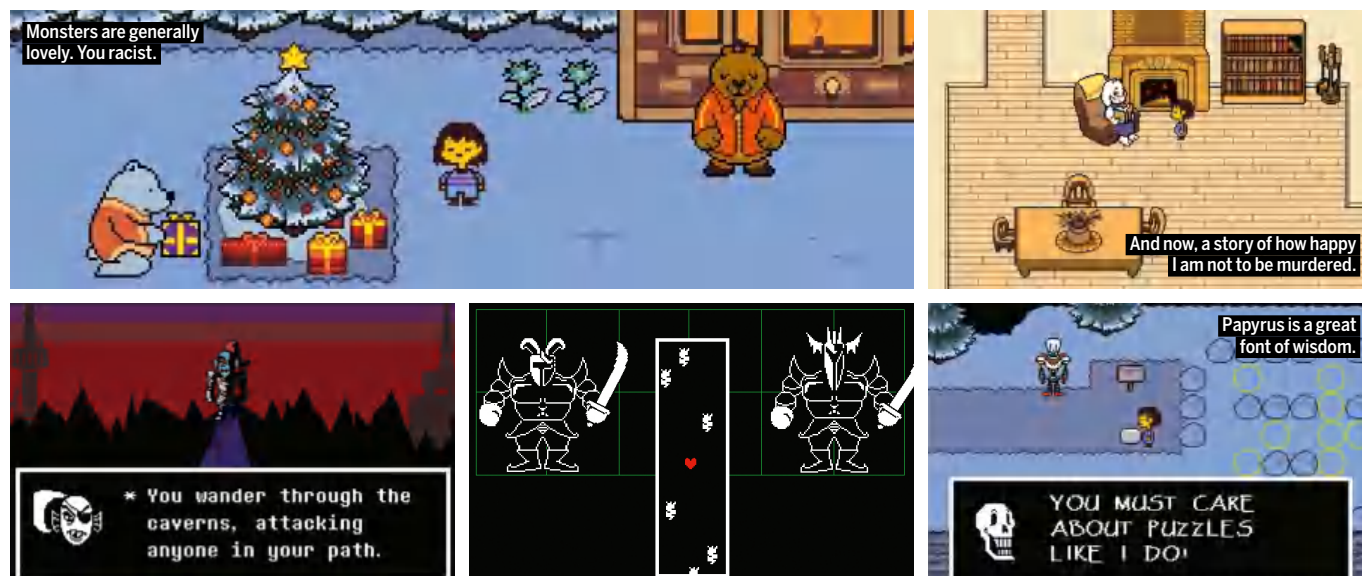
BEYOND EARTHBOUND

UNDERTALE is determined to reinvent the JRPG. *By Richard Cobbett*

Undertale shouldn't be spoiled in advance. You've seen the score, you've seen from the screenshots that it's a JRPG-style game, and I'll tell you up front, it's one of the funniest and best designed RPGs you're likely to play this year. Beyond that, I'll try to stay light on details—as much as I can while still telling you why it's great. Avoid Google, avoid forums. The less you know before diving in, the better it can work its magic.

The basic secret is that it's not entirely what it looks like: a goofy 16-bit RPG parody that owes a debt to *EarthBound*. It's partly that, sure, and it's brilliant at it. After a slow intro, it opens up into a world more densely packed with jokes and adorable characters than pretty much anything out there. Papyrus, the skeleton guard desperate for recognition and friends. His brother Sans, mocking RPG puzzles by just dumping a Junior Jumble to block your way. Crazy monsters like Woshua, who just wants you to be clean, and a ghost who only lowers his HP when you attack to be polite.

I haven't laughed this hard at a game in years, and if *Undertale* was purely a joke RPG like *Cthulhu Saves The World,* it would be enough. But that's just what's happening on the surface. The cleverness builds as you play, and systems that appeared throwaway end up more than they seemed. The big gimmick is that nobody has to die: there are ways to spare everything and everybody, from the wandering monsters to the bosses. Combat plays out via a series of minigames, mostly unique to each monster, in which you move your pixel heart around in a small box—dodging bullets, blocking shots with shields, simple platforming. It's often layered to make things more complicated when you face off against multiple enemies at once.

A basic example of the mechanics being more than they seem: *Undertale* often uses them to convey a character's mental state. Faster attacks when they're annoyed, bolder attacks when they're confident, or even aiming to miss when they don't really want to fight.

How you choose to handle things affects replays. Certain characters remember what you did the last time. Finishing the story only takes about 5-7 hours, but to dig into its secrets takes another couple of loops. A peaceful run leads to one of the most charming and heartfelt RPGs ever made. Murder, followed by a reload to see what might have been... well, you get what you deserve.

Undertale has its faults, including a couple of puzzles that wear out their welcome, and a first play that's a little too easy to be satisfying. On the other hand, this is basically a one-person project, and that really impresses, from the excellent use of simple graphics to convey emotion, to the fantastic lo-fi soundtrack. It may or may not be the best RPG you play this year, but it's going to be one of the most worthwhile—as memorable as anything in, say, *The Witcher 3*, and every bit as impressive. ■

> ## Certain characters remember what you did the last time

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

A hilarious JRPG romp with far more than just laughs on its side. *Undertale* has great replay value, too.

91

FIFA 16

Viewed from the wide camera, it can be hard to appreciate just how pretty *FIFA* is.

There are some superb visual details.

By default the CPU sliders are horribly in the AI's favor.
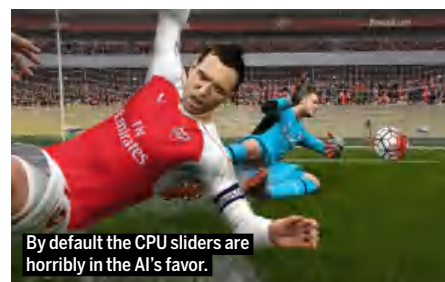
RECYCLE KICK

FIFA 16 is still a good soccer game. It's the same good soccer game. *By Dave Meikleham*

Reviewing *FIFA 16* for PC is a tricky proposition. After a certain point, there's a limit to how much you can improve something like this. Sure, EA Canada has yet again laid out an all encompassing soccer simulating smorgasbord that boasts immaculate presentation and dizzying production values. But it's hard to fight off the feeling that this season's effort is more a glorified DLC pack than the full priced annual update you'd hope for.

No Touch Dribbling. Dynamic Crossing. Clinical Finishing. Confidence In Defending. Interception Intelligence. Good lord does EA love a capitalized buzz phrase. Unfortunately, most of this year's supposedly new on-pitch features translate into diddly squat when you're looking for tangible, improvements over *FIFA 15*.

Nearly everything that was right and wrong on the field last year remains. That means slightly floaty shooting, fiddly tackling, lots of wing play and many an unspectacular tap-in dribbling over the line. It also means an incredibly solid passing game, emphasizing satisfying buildup play and ferociously whipped-in crosses. So EA's chart-topping juggernaut still plays a cracking game of soccer... for the most part.

> **FIFA's life-swallowing online offering is stronger than ever**

What little has changed concerns subtly tinkered-with passing on the ground. Previously, the complaint was that zipping the ball about a packed midfield was like a giant game of pinball played between 22 millionaires. Now stroking the ball even ten yards between midfielders can feel glacial, with passes demonstrably slower than last year.

It certainly gives *FIFA 16* a more realistic tempo—but given that many matches vs the CPU are already unspectacular affairs, it feels diligent, thoughtful, yet ultimately a little—whisper it—boring.

At least it's progressive in other areas. Look, it has human females and everything! At long last women are represented in a soccer game. Considering the impact last year's terrific Women's World Cup had on

broadening the appeal of the sport, this is a welcome inclusive move.

FIFA's life-swallowing online offering is stronger than ever, and FIFA Ultimate Team (the absurdly addictive card-collecting mode) is back and remains the crowning jewel. This time, the headline addition is FUT Draft; a set of one-off tournaments that reward you for putting together winning streaks. This being 2015, the juicy card prizes don't come free. You have to cough up 15,000 FUT coins or 300 FIFA points to enter a Draft tournament— the latter costing roughly $1 of real money per 100 points. At $60, *FIFA 16* isn't exactly great value for money, but you do still get masses of licensed teams, leagues and player likenesses. It's also a cracking port that runs well on a variety of rigs.

Is *FIFA 16* still the best soccer sim you can buy on PC? Absolutely. Has it also utterly stagnated over the last two years? You can bet Diego Costa's hollowed out soul it has. ∎

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

Still the best soccer game you can buy for your PC, but it's resting on its laurels. *FIFA 16* feels unambitious.

76

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- Multi-color Illuminated LED

Blood Bowl 2

Dice rolls influence everything.

You could play a decent game of quidditch in that arena.

FOUL PLAY

Lacking a proper coach, **BLOOD BOWL 2** gets left on the bench. *By James Davenport*

This is a turn-based fantasy boardgame loosely resembling American football. Functionally, it's fairly simple: teams pulled from the Warhammer races do a lot of punching, grunting, and bleeding. Players position their athletes on the line of scrimmage, then take turns performing up to one action with each. Each athlete has a specialization. You're encouraged to tackle, maim, or kill anyone, whether on offense or defense.

My favorite component is evaluating player movement. It's simple strategic fun. Positioning athletes together grants stat bonuses, so building clusters around players you want to protect is encouraged. Conversely, breaking through these clusters opens up holes in the opponent's defense, enabling ball carriers to fly through, or making passes easier to complete. If you understand the basics of American football, it's fairly simple to intuit. *Blood Bowl* just doesn't have a great way to teach its abstract, abundant rules.

The campaign functions as a jarring, drawn out tutorial. During the first few games, the focus is on player positioning, and it's impossible to fail routine actions, like picking up the ball or short passes. No obvious indication is made that anything has

been stripped from regular play. My first hours were spent in naive bliss. It felt as if I was playing a spiritual approximation of football, and it felt good. The bliss was short lived.

Game after game introduced a new rule that fundamentally changed how I played. Dice rolls were injected into nearly every action, players could get injured and die inexplicably, and time limits were imposed. Random events took place. During one game, the ref was apparently bribed by my opponent, and would tackle one of my players every few turns. What I thought was a purely tactical game with light elements of randomness was actually almost wholly dependent on dice rolls—most of which aren't immediately visible. Chance factors heavily, and not in a good way.

> **During one game, the ref was apparently bribed by my opponent**

My best-laid plans were usually upset by bad rolls during menial actions. Everything has a chance to fail, and once it does your turn is instantly over.

It's possible to spend weeks in the online league mode, playing in an array of tournament modes with players of a similar skill level, building a decent team from the transfer market, but there's still no immediate way for new players to hop in and feel viable. You could argue that a rough start is all part of roleplaying a team of amateurs, but long term grinding for a statistical advantage just doesn't sound fun.

Returning players might feel restricted too. The last iteration of *Blood Bowl* on the PC expanded its roster to 23 playable races, but *Blood Bowl 2* scales it back to eight.

If you have a group of friends really into Blood Bowl, then rejoice: this is a shiny, featured expression of the boardgame. If not, expect to be confounded and frustrated. ■

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

It's flashy, but scales back too much for returning players and doesn't accommodate the new ones.

60

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PIER PRESSURE

WORLD OF WARSHIPS is Wargaming's most nuanced vehicle combat yet.

By Ian Birnbaum

World of Warships, the newest entry in the Wargaming series after 2013's *World of Warplanes*, is out of drydock and officially launched. Its mix of ponderous warships and huge guns—the biggest guns ever fired in anger by mankind—is beautiful, polished, and a joy to play. *Warships* is the most thoughtful Wargaming game so far, but its economy continues the pattern of expensive, exploitative freemium prices.

Unlike the dense urban landscapes in *World of Tanks,* there's little to hide behind in *Warships.* Without the freedom to escape, turn, or hide, the game places even greater emphasis on group tactics and positioning.

Wargaming continues to be a dab hand at making controls that turn a complicated war machine into an accessible, keyboard-friendly vehicle. The rudder and throttle controls are designed to be set and forgotten, like a subordinate had an order yelled at them while the captain worried about other things.

Planning ahead is key for *Warships.* Especially in larger boats, bringing guns around to face an enemy takes a minute. Knowing where enemies will come from gives captains time to turn the explodey parts facing the bad guys.

During one battle at the helm of the USS Montana, I had a clean shot on an enemy cruiser that started making trouble some ten kilometers away. Though it pained me, I kept taking single shots instead of unleashing my entire battery at once, trying to get my aim just right. Each time, my shot fell just short or just off to the side of its vulnerable hull.

To better engage me, it turned its fat broadside my way and stopped closing the distance. I took one more targeting shot. When it landed smack amidships, I enjoyed an evil smile and fired all four batteries at once. Twelve 16-inch shells arced across the sky and dropped on the ship's head like the fist of an angry god, sinking it in one volley. If this had been *Counter-Strike,* I would have just landed a head-shot with the AWP. I got the same sense of satisfaction, even if it did take about five minutes to fully play out.

There's an art to angles in *Warships,* and it tickles the tiny, forgotten part of my brain that experiences math as a form of pleasure. With guns mounted all down the body of a ship, facing broadside to an enemy is the best offense. Unfortunately, that broadside shows the enemy team a huge target. There's a sweet spot at around 30 degrees that brings all guns onto a target while minimizing exposure. Instead of doing a barrel roll or hiding behind a bombed-out church, this mental geometry is how captains stay safe on the oceans.

STOCK THE LARDERS

All four types of ship also come in multiple tiers, representing the advances that technology brought them. The carrier is a good example: the lowest tier is a converted coal tanker, the USS Langley, with a deck covered in canvas-winged bi-planes. Carriers evolve up through the USS Lexington to the USS Midway, a late-War behemoth. There's no denying high-end vessels are crazy fun to play. The trouble is most players will never see these late game ships. *World of Warships* is Wargaming's most expensive, grind-heavy meta-economy yet.

Researching all of the American carrier branch would take me between 1,500 and 3,000 games—an interminable grind. It's laudable, I guess, that unskilled players can't just outright purchase the best ships in the game. Most players will have no problem unlocking the first four tiers of ships. But after that tier, prices go up exponentially until only a narrow sliver of die-hard fans will spend the money or time to be there.

For the rest of us, the lowest tier ships are good fun. With so much amazing art and incredible history in the biggest ships, though, I wish that more players could see everything *Warships* has to offer without an aggressive, expensive grind. ∎

> ## When it landed smack amidships, I enjoyed an evil smile

NAVY NUMBERS

I crunched the numbers on the price of *Warship*'s vessels, finding an exponential curve that takes off after tier 4. Wargaming is offering a free-to-play game, but after tier 4, you'll start paying—either in time or in money.

TIER	XP COST	SILVER COST
1	0	0
2	800	69,300
3	2,400	260,000
4	7,000	735,000
5	17,500	1,500,000
6	36,500	2,950,000
7	70,000	5,570,000
8	110,000	8,900,000
9	165,000	13,600,000
10	237,500	19,800,000

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

80
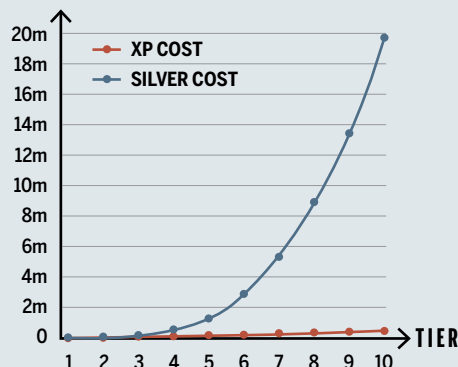
World of Warships is Wargaming's finest vehicle combat game, but its free-to-play model is getting very expensive.

The Japanese Hashidate is a capable entry-level ship with two massive gun platforms.

Weather effects give the few maps distinct flavors.
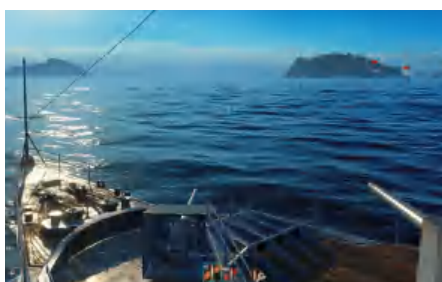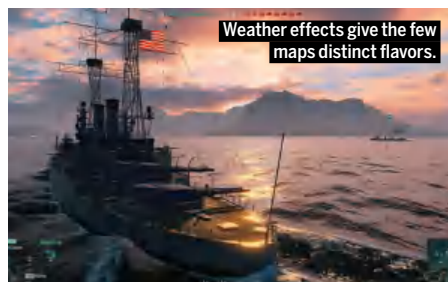
You can issue commands from the perspective of in-flight planes.
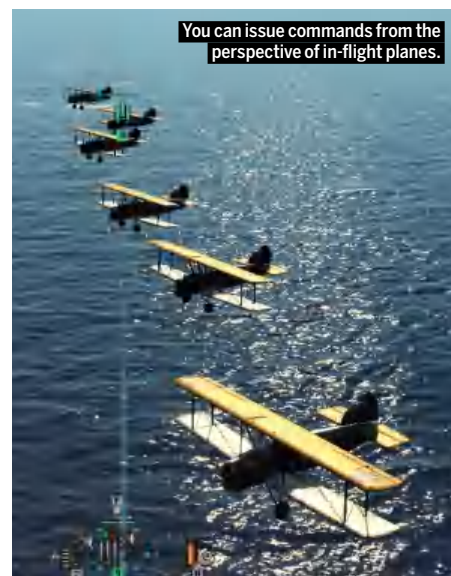
Lobbing broadside shells is good for concentrating firepower.

Sweet, fiery victory.

FREAKSHOW

DROPSY's hideous misshapen protagonist belies a wholesome and heartwarming game. *By Angus Morrison*

Dropsy is the quintessential point-and-click adventure: a circus of eccentric characters parading through a plot that starts loopy and aims for deranged, dressing up the otherwise dry business of using objects on other objects in dark comic style. It starts with just Dropsy the clown, his faithful hound and a series of orientation puzzles, until you assemble a whole party of misfits and tackle far more demanding challenges.

On Dropsy's hug-based quest to make the world a happier place, I've made soup for the king of a dump, raided a high-security medical facility (but not before forcing the guard bots to serve Martinis) and gone looking for little green men. I've met drug addicts and hate preachers, fist-bumped a bouncer, sold out a crim to the cops and performed last rites for a canary.

It's the variety that makes it, and it's rare to find a screen that doesn't contain some alluringly cryptic point of interest, the relevance of which will hit you only hours down the line. The exceptions are the occasional repeating puzzle (expect to get a lot of use out of your chicken mask), and the lengthy backtracking that the early game insists on.

Artistically, *Dropsy* resembles *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Only horrifying. 'Dropsy' being the old-timey term for oedema, the clown is bulbous and lumpen with a face that ensures children who didn't fear clowns before sure will now. Yet *Dropsy* has nothing to do with horror. The clown wants to make people smile, and then hug them. Nothing makes his distended, grotesque face happier. Successful hugs result in a full-screen announcement and a scream of ecstasy. Dropsy's ugliness throws the positive impact he has on the world into stark relief: people hate him, but he doesn't care. He'll match the desired object to the right grumpy human (or extraterrestrial) just to see them grin. He has no ulterior motive, and it makes for a roundly cheering experience. However, this unabashed joy makes the somber moments all the more startling. The devs' handle on tone is uncanny.

It captures the absurd, heady rush of '90s point-and-clicks flawlessly—it feels the way I remember adventure games feeling, when eking out the next bit of hyperactive story was more important than the puzzles themselves. But also preserved is the chronic problem of the genre: puzzles that feel like the product of a designer's idiosyncrasies as opposed to common sense. I needed a vampire mask from a costume shop, but the proprietor was clearly operating a fearsome 'no clowns' policy because I got chased away on approaching the counter. I had a locket that belonged to him, featuring a photo of his wife, who I knew to be dead—returning this, I thought, was sure to reconcile things. Nope: going near that till with locket in hand resulted in the same fit of abuse. The irritating thing is, I had the solution but wasn't going through the motions in the specific place where the game deemed it should work. At night, the proprietor moves somewhere he will accept the locket, but it takes good fortune or a methodical search of the map in both day and night phases to discover.

SADFACE

Dropsy's difficulty spikes are often a product of the way it communicates. Rather than words, it uses pictograms to convey the wants and needs of the grumpy population, and since these are drawn with just a handful of pixels, translating what NPCs are trying to tell you is often more effort than puzzling out how to achieve it. In *Dropsy*'s world, the difference between a Twinkie and experimental medicine is not always clear.

Dropsy is sometimes dysfunctional, but loving, happy and fun. Dark undertones, like Dropsy's nightmares and the fact that he's an arson suspect, will get you moving, but it's positivity that will carry you to the end. You're not puzzling for personal gain, but to make the world better for everyone, and Dropsy's enthusiasm for light, carefree problem-solving is infectious. ∎

> ## The difference between a Twinkie and medicine is not always clear

CIRCUS TROUPE

The artists you need to assemble, and why

DROPSY
Voluminous clown trousers ideal for stashing items; rubbery, malformed arms are an optimal hugging tool. Performance slightly marred by PTSD.

DOG
Expertise in earthworks and excavation; can double as a gravedigger should the need arise. Made happiest by peeing on fire hydrants or similar.

MOUSE
Takes small spaces in its tiny stride; enjoys provoking robots in downtime. Has initial trouble overcoming fear of waistcoated rats.

CANARY
Loves: flight; birdseed; knocking things off carefully arranged shelves; adequate funeral arrangements. Hates: mines.

PCGAMER **VERDICT**

An excellent stab at a traditional point-and-click adventure, with traditional problems holding it back.

78

Dropsy won't pass up a chance to make himself more repulsive.

The best caricatures include a junkyard king and a supermarket guard.

Turns out security bots don't like being set to Martini mode.

Nice office. Now what on Earth are you saying?

DIGITALSTORM

AVENTUM
3

intel CORE i7 inside

AVENTUM 3

GEFORCE GTX

DIGITALSTORM

GEFORCE GTX
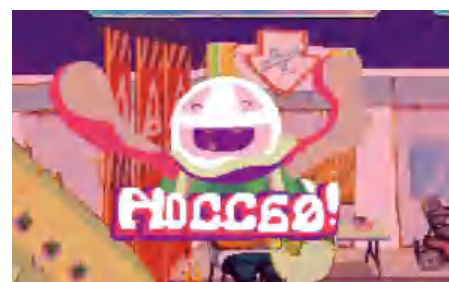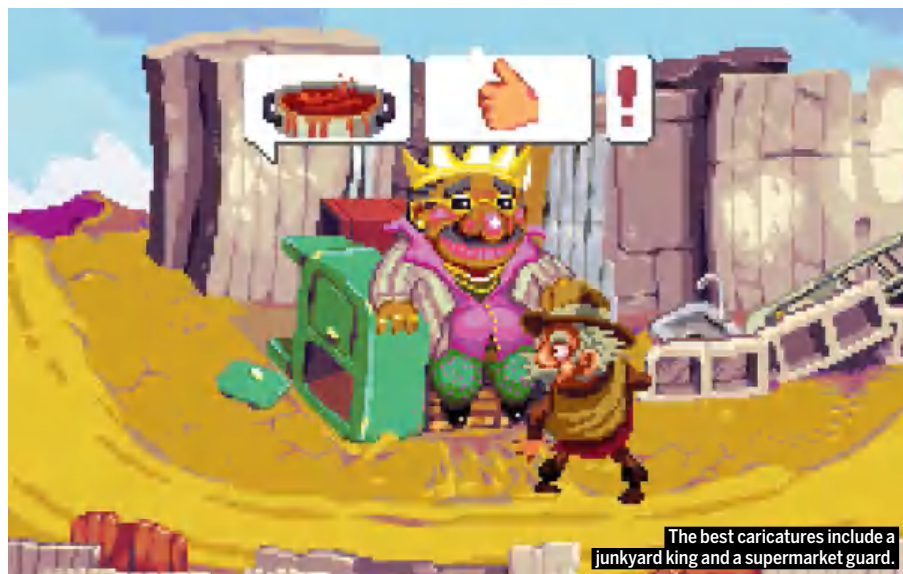
COMPUTER LOVE

Hack anything and everything in the strange, wonderful ELSE HEART.BREAK().

By Andy Kelly

The world of *else Heart.Break()* is not like our own. In this strange place, atoms have been replaced with bits, enabling people to hack into, and alter, the very fabric of reality. With the right tools, you can dive into almost any object's code, edit it, and change its behavior—to solve problems, cause mischief, or just for fun. It's also a game about love, friendship, and finding your place in the world—and it all starts with a chance encounter in a bar.

You, Sebastian, arrive in the city of Dorisburg to work as a salesman for the Wellspring soda company. You feel lost. Anyone who's ever left home and moved to a new city will know the feeling of walking unfamiliar streets, surrounded by strangers.

In these opening hours, *else Heart. Break()* feels like a fairly traditional, albeit non-linear, point-and-click adventure. You check in at the rundown Devotchka hotel, meet a fellow Wellspring employee, and explore the city. There's no journal or map telling you where to go: you have to figure it out by yourself.

That's not helped by the confusing layout of the city, but you soon settle into the game's unusual rhythm. Over time, the streets become more familiar. You sell soda, make friends, drink beer, hang out, and go to bed when it gets dark.

Dorisburg is a sprawling, intricate city, and almost every building can be entered and explored. The geometry of its cardboard dioramas is simple, but artful use of light and shadow—and vivid, psychedelic textures—brings them to life. *else Heart.Break()* brilliantly captures contemporary city life, and has some of the best art direction I've seen in a game. You'll want to explore every corner of it.

Then you meet Pixie, and everything changes. You bump into her in a bar and she excitedly welcomes you to Dorisburg, inviting you to a party the following night. The story has multiple endings, and meeting Pixie—who Sebastian immediately becomes infatuated with—sets it in motion. But there's no pressure to reach the end. You can pursue the story as doggedly, or as leisurely, as you feel.

Soon after meeting Pixie, you learn about hacking, and this is when *else Heart.Break()* really gets good. Equip a device called a modifier and a new 'hack' option appears in the context menu when you hover over an object. Click on it and you'll see the code that governs how the object behaves, which can be edited to make it do different things. It sounds daunting, but you'll be surprised how easy it is to get to grips with.

CODE TALKER

You don't have to know anything about programming to enjoy this side of the game. I've never coded anything in my life, and I was constantly surprising myself by writing code that didn't immediately make the object I was hacking smoke and spark—a cute visual indicator that what you've just written is full of errors. Solving puzzles through hacking is super satisfying, and the flexibility of the language means there are always multiple solutions.

There are clear, well-written tutorials, but mostly I learned by looking at existing code. You eventually reach a point where limitations that bugged you earlier in the game can suddenly be solved through hacking. Feeling tired? Don't bother running back to the hotel to sleep: tweak the code in a glass of water to reduce your sleepiness, then drink it. Need to be on the other side of town? Hack a nearby door to transport you there. It's almost as if

> **Tweak the code in a glass of water to reduce your sleepiness, then drink it**

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE

these intrusive systems exist solely to make players invent workarounds.

Sebastian eventually starts working for a group of hackers fighting the Ministry, a sinister government agency that's cracking down on hacking and stripping the city of its personality. To join their ranks you need to complete a series of hacking challenges, which serve as more in-depth tutorials. Then, if you pass and become a member, you're sent on missions that are real tests of your coding prowess. But the solution to a problem is always in the environment somewhere: either on floppy disks scattered around the place or discovered by studying code and reverse-engineering it.

By the end I'd grown attached to Dorisburg and its eccentric residents. *else Heart.Break()* has a lot of personality, with funny, idiosyncratic dialogue, pop culture references that don't feel forced, superb music, and likeable characters.

When you're lost and can't figure out what to do next, the vague, open-ended structure can feel a little obtuse. The camera is flaky, with bits of scenery occasionally obscuring your view. And some of the coding puzzles will prove challenging for amateurs. But get past these problems and you'll find a brilliantly stylish, original game that combines elements of point-and-click adventures, open-world games, and RPGs in a unique, exciting way. It gives you the power to explore, rewrite, and experiment with the systems that govern the game, and has spawned a community of enthusiastic coders who are finding ways to do amazing things. You might feel confused at first, but stick with this game and you'll experience something really special. ■

PC GAMER **VERDICT**

A beautiful adventure game with heart, humor, and hacking puzzles that even non-coders can enjoy.

86

Every computer can be used and hacked.

This shady fellow is from the Ministry.

It's a digital world, but it still has trees.

Pounding beers at Club Dot.

MEET AND GREET

Some citizens of Dorisburg

PIXIE
A spirited hacktivist. Sebastian falls in love with her, but she has a boyfriend already. Damn.

HANK
A laid-back porter at the Hotel Devotchka who teaches you the basics of hacking with the modifier.

BERND
A beer-loving German tourist who shares the hotel with you. I hacked his bank account. I feel bad.

MOZ
A charming man with a marvellous quiff who looks suspiciously like a certain Mancunian singer.

BOWER
A sharp-suited bureaucrat from the sinister Computer Ministry. Fashionable, but not to be trusted.

ARAKI
An enigmatic woman of few words. One of the best hackers in the Lodge, but has no time for small talk.

This is how you hack things.

OVERDRIVE

Unforgiving and as hard as nails, post-apocalyptic **SKYSHINE'S BEDLAM** is a roguelike road trip through hell. *By Ian Birnbaum*

From inside my Dozer, I watch the wasteland roll by. A fortress on wheels, the Dozer carries thousands of passengers, a squad of soldiers, numerous supplies, and vats of artificial meat. It's a brutal solution to a brutal problem: get these pilgrims across an apocalyptic desert to the paradise beyond. The hostile gangs of mutants out there are one kind of obstacle, but the harsh laws of supply and demand are a tougher one.

Bedlam is a turn-based roguelike about taking risks and making hard choices. Everything has a cost. Stopping to speak with travelers will cost fuel, food, and days on the road. Finding out that they're insane robots will cost my soldiers a dead comrade and days in hospital. Choosing to drive past them would have lost me hundreds of gallons of precious crude oil.

Looking down at the minimap, I choose a route running along a twisting road. After each leg of the journey, the map shows local destinations that can be explored. These shorter roads don't cost much to get to and always have a fight waiting at the end, but winning those fights restocks various essentials such as fuel, food and power.

The map and the choices made there are *Bedlam*'s ruthless balancing act: driving costs fuel; transporting crew costs food; your soldiers have to fight to restock. If you run out of anything essential, the expedition is over. The more days tick by, the more dangerous the wastes become.

Special encounters help flesh out the weird Mad Max fiction of *Bedlam*. I've met mutants, seers, robots, cyborgs, bandits, and merchants—and only a few of those tried to kill me. I was eaten by giant sandworms and reinforced by refugees. Making a wasteland feel alive is tricky business—a wasteland is, by definition, a place where nothing lives—but *Bedlam*'s apocalypse is teeming with danger. The wonderful art is almost too colorful for a game set in the desert, and after several hours, I'm confident

in saying that *Bedlam* rocks my favorite soundtrack in any game since *Bastion*.

Some special events provide an opportunity to upgrade the Dozer, making it more fuel efficient, or cheaper to use. It speaks to *Bedlam*'s incredible balance that I reached the end many times, but I always barely limped over the finish line. Even on the easiest difficulty it wasn't a stroll in the park. On harder difficulties, I never made it across at all.

There's a second, less successful half to *Bedlam*. Every fight that

> ## Empty barracks doomed my expedition more than any other cause

breaks out on the map screen is played out on an isometric grid. Squad members come in four classes, organized by weapon: sword, shotgun, pistol, and sniper rifle. These troops have different movement and firing ranges, and the resulting combat feels a little bit like chess, albeit heavily modified.

Casualties are to be expected, and that's where *Bedlam* runs into the most trouble. I found it so completely impossible to escape from a battle unharmed—even when I enjoyed a total victory—that empty barracks doomed my expedition more often than any other cause. *Bedlam* is a game of warring incentives: explore opportunities for supplies at the expense of a dwindling roster of doomed young people.

HUMAN RESOURCES

XCOM also features permadeath, and also thrives on the sense of danger that accompanies every conflict, but no matter how bad things get, there are always more recruits. The worldwide XCOM project doesn't end because of an unlucky grenade throw. In *Bedlam*, dead soldiers end the journey. For me, this is where the game crossed the line from enjoyably brutal to stressful frustration.

In *Bedlam*, no matter what you do, you're going to get screwed. When I did make it to the finish line, it was after an uncomfortably stressful trip that I stopped enjoying. This game is made of moments of relief and victory and tension and stress. That kind of toughness can be appealing—the way *Dark Souls* is beloved for its challenge—and there's no doubt *Bedlam* is a finely-crafted game with delicately balanced combat. But it's too menacing for me, and I am glad to be done sweating through it. ∎

DOZING OFF *Apocalypse car games*

On the long trek across Bedlam, the people of the Dozer have to make their own entertainment
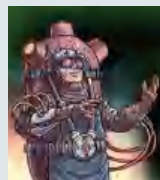
I SPY
I spy something... dead.

MUTANT, CYBORG, ROBOT
Like Rock, Paper, Scissors, but someone always ends up shot.
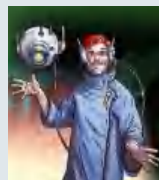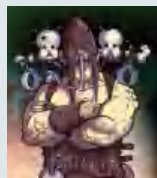
SLUG BUG
The first player to spot a giant radioactive insect gets to punch a friend.
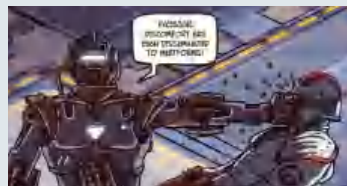
20 QUESTIONS
Same as regular 20 questions, but the loser ends up getting liquidated for fuel.

PC GAMER | **VERDICT**

A punishing sci-fi take on the *Rogue*-inspired genre, *Bedlam* is weird and colorful and stressful to play.

72

Save energy cells to lob ship-based special weapons.
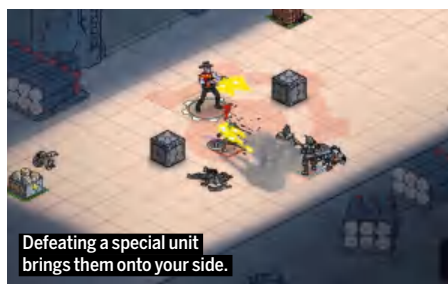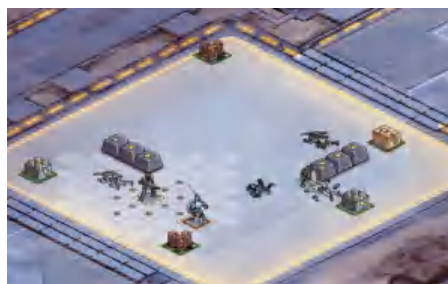
Defeating a special unit brings them onto your side.

WEAPON   26   EQUALIZER

I hope you went to the bathroom before we left.

Picking up cases mid-battle earns you more supplies.

Taking down an enemy special unit costs you most of a squad.

WEAPON   136   EQUALIZER
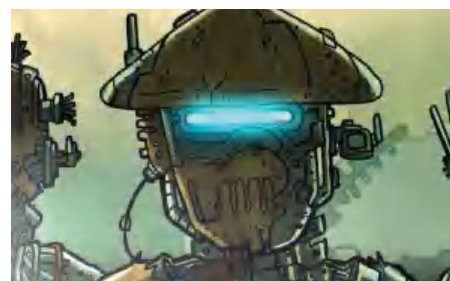
FAIR WELL

Is **DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION–TRESPASSER** a worthy way to end this run of DLC? *By Phil Savage*

As Chris pointed out when he reviewed *Jaws of Hakkon*, BioWare's DLC releases tend to fall into a few broad categories. *Jaws of Hakkon* was a quality side-chapter that stood aside from *Inquisition*'s main campaign. The recent *Descent* was as disposable as *Mass Effect 3*'s *Omega*—only worse, because it was set in the bloody Deep Roads. *Inquisition*'s final DLC, *Trespasser*, is the third type of BioWare DLC.

It's a continuation of the main story that serves to set up the future and bid farewell to the past. It's not on par with *Mass Effect 3*'s exemplary *Citadel*, but then it doesn't need to be: *Dragon Age*'s varied protagonists and settings mean the series isn't as suited to fourth-wall breaking sentimentality. It's not as funny, either. Nevertheless, *Trespasser* is a fitting conclusion to *Inquisition*—both its highs and its lows.

Trespasser takes place two years after the events of *Inquisition*. Divine Victoria—whoever that is in your game—calls for an Exalted Council at the Winter Palace to decide the fate of the Inquisition. Ferelden wants you disbanded, and your armies off their lawn. Orlais seeks to bring you under their direct control. It is heavily implied that this is one political situation you can't easily talk your way out of.

In other words, it's the same setup as used for many of *Dragon Age:*

Inquisition's main missions. More than in any previous *Dragon Age*, *Inquisition*'s protagonist exists as a political force—albeit one that is regularly called away to stab some demons. Here, too, your negotiations are cut short by the discovery of a dead Qunari soldier in the grounds of the Winter Palace. It is decided that, rather than continuing to make snide remarks at high-ranking officials, you should probably figure out how he got to be there.

Doing so takes you on a lengthy linear quest (around five to seven hours) that flits between multiple settings. Do you enjoy exploring the Deep Roads? I hope so, because there's yet another section in the Deep Roads. You'll get into plenty of fights along the way, but there's precious little to advance combat beyond what can be found in the 50+ hour main campaign.

I didn't find *Trespasser*'s primary antagonist particularly compelling. As with everything rooted in Qunari

Everything from nerfing health potions to buffing bears

values, an implacable sense of duty to the Qun lends an inevitability to even the most outrageous plans. More deft is the way the plot serves as an excuse to weave in threads left hanging from the main campaign. One of the DLC's early locations is a sanctuary belonging to Fen'Harel. If you finished *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, you'll know why that's significant.

PLAYING CATCH-UP

Outside of the main quest, you get to hang out in the Winter Palace's courtyard. While there you can catch up with companions, and find out how each has spent the last couple of years. These opening vignettes as your renew your acquaintance with your pals is as close to *Citadel* as *Dragon Age* has ever come. It doesn't entirely work. With no time to be eased into the joviality, these skits feel jarring—particularly Sera's bizarre prank sequence. It comes across as a forced attempt to top the sequence from the main campaign, tonally out of place. Much better is the less visual reintroduction to The Iron Bull—a scene that's all the funnier for its more subtle nature. In addition to which, Cullen has a dog now. So that's fun.

There's not much in the way of side-content. A few optional fights offer hidden treasures, and exploration can uncover stat bonuses. *Trespasser* also adds optional difficulty modifiers to the main game—everything from nerfing health potions to buffing bears—that offer the chance of special rewards. Ultimately though, *Trespasser* is *Inquisition*'s epilog. It offers a long, twisting mission, fun character moments and a satisfying payoff. It's uneven, but worthwhile—just about justifying its $15 price. ■

INQUEST *How welcome are these returning elements?*

Bar chart with y-axis labels (top to bottom): Very!, Sort of, Not really, Deep Roads, Not. X-axis categories: Politics, Combat, Varric, Sera, Deep Roads, Lore.

PC GAMER — **VERDICT**

77
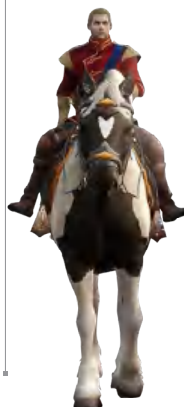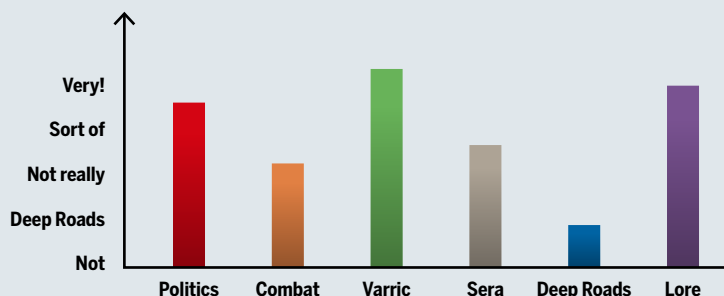
A lengthy quest with a satisfying pay-off makes up for unimaginative encounters. A worthy end to *Inquisition*.

Ignore the blood. We were killing ten bears.

Great job elves, you broke physics.

Cullen, smouldering for his Tumblr fans.

Being in the Deep Roads makes me want to stab things.

EXTRA+LIFE

CONTINUED ADVENTURES IN GAMING

"My sneaking suit and stealth camo make me feel stupidly powerful"

Covering old ground in **METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN**

I t's been 46 hours since I last played Phantom Limbs, the first proper mission in *Metal Gear Solid V*. It's a simple one: infiltrate an enemy base and rescue a prisoner, Miller. When I first did it, I only had the most basic equipment and was still getting used to the game. But now I have all manner of high-tech gadgets and modded weapons, and I know it inside out. So I thought it'd be fun to try it again, but this time fully kitted out.

I equip Snake with a level 3 tranq pistol (long range, extended clip), and a non-lethal sniper rifle with a suppressor. I'm wearing an upgraded sneaking suit, which makes my footsteps silent, and I've brought a prototype stealth camo, which makes me totally invisible for a few seconds. Compared to the loadout I had when I did the mission nearly 50 hours ago, I'm hilariously overpowered.

ANDY KELLY

THIS MONTH
Rescued an old friend for the second time.

ALSO PLAYED
Dropsy, SOMA

But it won't be a walk in the park. In *The Phantom Pain*, enemies get stronger over time. As I use my scope to mark targets and plan my next move, I notice that most of them are packing much bigger guns and tougher armor than before. They've also littered their bases with blow-up decoys, which look like real guards from a distance.

I love this, because it makes replaying missions worthwhile. So do the optional bonus objectives, which reveal themselves after you finish a mission for the first time. It feels like I'm

playing a new mission entirely, and it presents a stiff challenge, even with my developed skills and upgraded arsenal. Before I rescue Miller I decide to complete all the bonus objectives, which include extracting an enemy commander from a nearby barracks and locating a hidden diamond.

MILLER TIME
I head towards Ghwandai Town, where Miller is held. I find a spot overlooking it and spend some time marking guards. Compared to the story missions I've been doing recently, it's positively understaffed. I've developed a pretty

I NOTICE THAT MOST OF THEM ARE PACKING MUCH BIGGER GUNS AND TOUGHER ARMOR THAN BEFORE

I'm coming for you, Miller.

Headshots won't work on this guy.

sharp instinct for how far guards can see, and I slip into the town easily. I snipe a few of them along the way, because the less people roaming around when I'm escaping with Miller slung over my shoulders, the better.

The combination of the sneaking suit, my silenced weapons, and the stealth camo—which I use to slip silently past a pair of guards blocking the path to Miller's location—makes me feel stupidly powerful. I still have to be careful, though, because I want a high score. Using the stealth camo automatically prevents me from getting an S rank, but an A will do. I meticulously move through the town, incapacitating guards and dragging their bodies out of sight. I reach Miller, free him, and throw him over my shoulders.

The extraction is hindered by the arrival of the Skulls—the most annoying thing in the entire game. The first time around, they spotted me and I had to sprint away from them. This time I use the stealth camo to wander casually past. They don't seem to notice Miller, even though the camo doesn't make him invisible, but I don't complain.

I escape on the chopper with Miller, earning a tidy A rank and a few elite volunteer soldiers for my troubles. Now I want to revisit more missions to see how my new gear changes things. ◼

Yes, the word 'STUPID' *is* crafted into the sand.

"This is the only part of the game that's mine"

Returning to work in **MINECRAFT**

▶ **PHIL SAVAGE**

THIS MONTH
Bid farewell to old jobs. And in the game.

ALSO PLAYED
Metal Gear Solid V, Diablo III

Back when I was a PC Gamer rookie, I made a major mistake. While talking to an editor I mentioned in passing that I played *Minecraft*. Specialization is like catnip to editors. They go crazy for the stuff. The news spread, and then *Minecraft* released on consoles. Soon, I was 'The Minecraft Guy'—the point of contact for any Future Publishing editor in need of a tips guide or mod round-up.

This, at least, was not as bad as the time I became 'The MMO Guy'—a period that ended with me emerging, malnourished and incoherent, after a full week locked in my bedroom playing *Firefall*. *Minecraft* was an easier beat, but I never really liked it on more than an intellectual level. I don't enjoy crafting, for one thing. I do like punching trees and mining ores, but I'm not sure that's enough for a years-long relationship.

BACK ON THE CORNERS
It took time, but I finally managed to distance myself from the game professionally. Returning to it on a whim, I find myself gloriously free from the weight of deadlines or responsibility. Why, I can just look around the

place—poking into half-finished adventure maps, or trying to remember why I installed a geologically accurate recreation of York.

I also rediscover a world I created specifically for an old tips guide. Over the years, it expanded. It's part inventor's workshop, part film set—a place to take screenshots and test out builds. The centerpiece is a house on a cliff at the edge of two biomes. There's a jukebox, and next to it a chest containing a single copy of 'Chirp'. I used to play that record on a loop as I attempted to capture the perfect screenshot of some bookshelves.

Below the cliff, a series of concrete boxes contain my various experiments with redstone—structures whose only use is to prove they can be built. As I leave the world, I consider deleting it. I stop myself when I realize that—more than any of my attempts to play properly—this is the only part of the game distinctly mine.

It's not creative. It doesn't show off any aptitude for building, crafting or adventuring. It's a testament to the one area of my life where *Minecraft* played an important role: my career. ◼

I opened *FIFA* packs on YouTube, but no one watched because I wasn't abrasive enough.

Worth every penny.

Every penny.
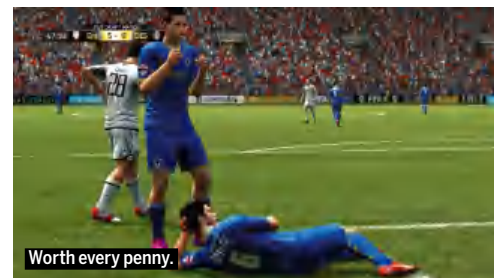
"Hair aside, my soccer players don't gel"

Assembling the world's most hateful FIFA 16 team

Before I lost my ambition and people skills around the age 12 or so, I always said that if I became a soccer manager, step one of my career would be locking everyone in a room for 24 hours so they could get to know each other and—unless I opened the door to find they'd all fought to the death—hopefully play better soccer as a result. Sadly, there's no such option in *FIFA 16*'s new Ultimate Team Draft.

Ultimate Team is essentially a trading card metagame within *FIFA 16* where you buy and sell players online to build dream squads. In Draft, the biggest addition since the mode's inception, you're loaned quality players to pick from in each position—the rarities that would make a professional YouTuber *FIFA* Pack Opener's face melt. People have wandered EA Canada's stacked menu wasteland for years and never known the joy of seeing Ibrahimovic's squashed face peek out from under a wrapper. And snagging Ronaldo? It's a 1 in 75,000 chance from a gold pack.

But in Draft, the first pack I open offers Ronnie for rent, so I immediately set him as attacking right. It's a decision I come to regret upon opening the next deck and finding a grinning Robben.

▶ BEN GRIFFIN

THIS MONTH
Spent too much on *FIFA* packs, must now eat canned tuna.

ALSO PLAYED
How Do You Do It?

Ordinarily he'd link up nicely with my superstar striker, but here, like in school and later my dating life, I have a little problem: chemistry. If adjacent players share nationalities, clubs or leagues, chemistry increases and soccer quality improves. However, if one of them is Portuguese and plays in Spain and the other is Dutch and plays in Germany, what you have is a culturally confused squad of alienated millionaires.

The non-delicious contents of my melting pot are starting to congeal, like neglected muesli. Every pack I open introduces yet another foreign player from yet another foreign league, and while that's fantastically inclusive and everything, I need a more conservative

I NEED A MORE CONSERVATIVE IMMIGRATION POLICY IF MY TEAM IS TO SUCCEED

immigration policy if my team is to succeed. Finally my back four hits a purple patch as I draw consecutive Italians from the mediterranean strand of EA's algorithm, and one by one introduce them to each other like I'm dropping them off at daycare.

UNITED WE FALL
Due to my focus on chemistry and the impossible goal of turning every thread green, however, I ignore another quite important facet of my players: their rating. Just as you want players to talk the same language and be into the same bands and stuff, you want them to be, well, good at playing soccer. The drubbing I get in my first match might have something to do with decisions such as ditching Real Madrid star Sergio Ramos in favor of a random scrub from Atalanta, which I could have sworn is a city in America. Hair aside, my soccer players just don't gel.

The real kicker, though, is having to pay an entry fee for the privilege of playing Draft again. Since you can win packs from it, and packs cost money, it makes sense, but you know what doesn't? Finding myself booting up Draft again and again to lash the majority of my disposable income on virtual soccer players when the heating in my flat has run out. ∎

"Starbreeze's games are slightly better than those films deserve"

Plotting a long prison breakout in **THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA**

I 've just wandered into a prisoner's cell and beaten him to death because two guys asked me to. I'm new in Butcher Bay, the sci-fi prison constructed exclusively to detain gruff men, and the only place the guards can't stop you killing someone is in a prison cell. Start a fight outside, in say, the courtyard, and you get zapped by the guards and carried back to your cell.

My reward for killing the prisoner, known as Molina, is a knuckleduster and a bit of respect from the other inmates. It's not the sort of choice I would make in an RPG, but for Riddick, a man who killed a bunch of people then found himself in space jail, the logic of this makes perfect sense. He is, based on what I've learned from a pretty average series of movies, a criminal and a dangerous man, and here he finds himself in a place full of them. Beating a guy to death for a melee weapon has a sort of logic to it.

Escape from Butcher Bay, the 2004 FPS that was remade in 2009's *Assault on Dark Athena*, is the best game set in a prison I've ever played. While the Riddick films have a cult audience, they're not my sort of thing—I haven't been able to watch Vin Diesel in a film since I saw the memorably appalling

▶ **SAMUEL ROBERTS**

THIS MONTH
Shivved a guy on my block for being mildly sarcastic.

ALSO PLAYED
GTA Online, Rocket League

poster for 2005's The Pacifier, in which Diesel is playing an action hero who is also a babysitter. It just put me off his entire body of work, to be honest. Sorry Vin, I'm sure you're a good bloke.

I actually think Starbreeze's games are better than the films deserve. Riddick is no generation's Star Wars. We live in a world where there's been three Riddicks and only one Serenity. That's horseshit. In *Butcher Bay,* it feels like the Starbreeze team manages to do a lot with a little. They pick one corner of this fictional universe where the protagonist would have a sense of purpose. The environments are pretty samey and it's mostly composed of corridors, which makes sense when you're dealing with a

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE THERE'S BEEN THREE RIDDICKS AND ONLY ONE SERENITY. THAT'S HORSESHIT

prison; you don't expect sprawling jungles or enormous sci-fi sandboxes.

The magic of *Athena* is in making the slow build towards a prison break feel dramatic, and to gradually empower the player as they get hold of the tools to make it happen. When I kill the right person, tipped off by another prisoner, I get hold of a shiv. When I use a shiv to stab a prisoner holding court in Butcher Bay, I open up the opportunity to reach the infirmary, kill a guard and then make haste towards a surgery area that will let me use the prison's DNA-encoded rifles.

VIN OR LOSE

It's from here that a full-on prison riot breaks out, mostly represented as crowd jeering noises while Riddick is sneaking through corridors, with the odd instance of a prisoner being executed by a guard in the background. Like I said, Starbreeze does a lot with a little. But what this arc of gradual player empowerment does has nothing to do with the Riddick movies at all; it's about selling the idea of a prison break, about going from new guy to top of the ladder, and the feeling that you're moving towards freedom. And the game has another trick up its sleeve: there's nothing waiting at the end of this escape attempt other than another, even worse prison to break out of. ■

It's shiv-or-be-shivved kind of world.

The aesthetics of the various levels are spot-on.

T he procedurally generated arcade game now has Steam Workshop support, and people have been making some *amazing* things.

GEO METRO
Relive that bit from the second Harry Potter film with this beautifully mundane flying car, modeled after the Geo Metro LSi. Wizards not included, but this mod has magic aplenty.

www.bit.ly/SkyRogue1

STAR FOX
The *Star Fox* Arwing doesn't look too out of place in *Sky Rogue*, being another low poly beauty itself. It's joined by various other ships from the universe of this Super Nintendo game.

www.bit.ly/SkyRogue2

VIC VIPER
It's only the Vic Viper from 2D side-scrolling *Gradius*, a videogame legend you can finally take for a spin in a fully 3D space. See how its spaceships fare in places with an atmosphere (surprisingly well, it turns out).

www.bit.ly/SkyRogue3

1 HALF-LINE MIAMI

FREEWARE *Episode 3* takes a surprising new direction

H alf-Life 2's gravity gun always seemed like the kind of gimmick that should have been stolen by more games. **Oh, we had similar items in *Doom 3*, *BioShock* and *Dead Space*, but these were token inclusions, in worlds not built for the act of vacuuming up debris and throwing it at people.**

Half-Life Miami might be the best gravity gun game since *Half-Life 2: Episode 2*, and that's partly because you're not given anything else. It's a mash-up of *Hotline Miami* and *Half-Life 2*, taking the former's top-down perspective, garish aesthetic and daunting difficulty level, and lobbing in Gordon Freeman, City 17, and a bunch of Combine. There are eight levels here, taken from key moments in *Half-Life 2*, and like Gordo's real adventure it begins

with the G-Man waking him up after a lengthy snooze.

The key difference is that Gordon now emerges with the gravity gun equipped, letting you suck up bins from the get-go, and hurl one in the face of that smug guard at the train station who makes you pick that can up. You can also ruin the faces of zombies using conveniently explosive barrels, and other things that are not as fun because they're not explosive barrels.

There's still plenty of fun to be had flinging stuff at Combine cops, an act that feels surprisingly creative as you'll select the murder weapons yourself from nearby detritus. You can also funnel that creativity into the included level editor, too. Why not remake *Episode 1, 2* or...*3*?

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/Half-Line

3 LOST HEAVEN

MOD Explore *Mafia*'s 1930s city with chums

This mod adds multiplayer to the original *Mafia*, then sets players loose on the streets of the game's fictional, 1930s-era city. Lost Heaven was never a true open-world metropolis, however, so you'll have to make your own fun, whether by shooting your fellow wiseguys, or creating makeshift races with the many period cars.

This is the multiplayer mob-'em-up you've always dreamed of. Even if it is a little uglier and emptier than you might have wished, it will only improve from here on in.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/LostHeaven

Put your hands up if you *really* love doing crimes.
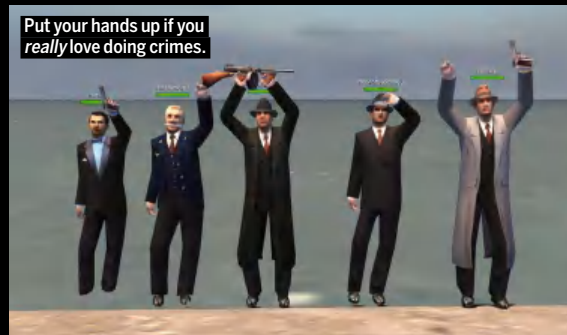
4 SKIPPING STONES TO LONELY HOMES

WEBGAME Hope you didn't have stuff to do today

Like Alan Hazelden's similarly excellent *Mirror Isles*, this is a deceptively simple game about a person traveling between a series of islands.

There are two tools at your disposal: stones and lily pads. Stones can be lobbed across the water to an adjacent patch of land, while lily pads can be shifted about using water currents.

You'll need to introduce each item to its neighbor, at the exact right spot, in the *exact* right sequence, to cross from one island to another.

Skipping Stones will get under your skin. You'll quit, angrily and often, before you get to the end, but you'll be thinking about stones and lily pads for days.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/SkipStones

1 THE ROCK
Exhibit A, a stone. This has just been kicked upwards by yours truly, knocking a lily pad towards a sunken rock.

2 LILY-LIVERED
Lily pads can be stepped on to cross between islands. The hard part is getting them where you want them.

3 WASHED-UP
This is you. You're trying to find wood so that you can rebuild your boat. It's easy to forget that.
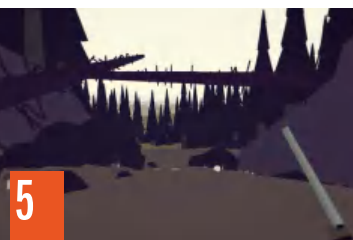
5 RED AMAZON

FREEWARE Not very red, not set in the Amazon

You might know Tom van den Boogaart for his cyberpunk exploration game *Bernband*. Here he's swapped jagged pixels for smooth low poly assets in the engaging, atmospheric *Red Amazon*. It's a short story of sorts set in a seemingly abandoned woodland environment, and despite my use of the word 'seemingly' just then, it's not actually a horror game.

It's a game about you and your inclinations as a player, and another element unexpectedly introduced later on. Yes, I'm being deliberately and annoyingly vague, because this quietly twisty FPS is all about its punchline of an ending. Or *endings*, should I say? Perhaps I should, perhaps I shouldn't. Ahhh.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/RedAmazonTom

6 HALF-LIFE 2 SUBSTANCE

New weapons, plus reworkings of existing ones.

MOD Gordon Freeman suits up—again

Substance has been re-released in a 10th Anniversary Edition that adds over 100 extra maps. The 'VR Missions' bundle contains new versions of around a decade of *Half-Life 2* mods, reworked to be compatible with the additional features *Substance* brings to the table.

Substance's Big Thing is its HEV suit modes, which enable Gordon Freeman to become invisible, to smother himself in a tingly energy shield, to slow time, heal critical wounds, or be really good at hitting people for a while. Sound familiar? The *Crysis* inspiration is as obvious as it is inaccurate, as the original version of *Substance* came out two years before Crytek's nano-powered tropical shooter.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/HL2Substance

7 FRAN BOW

DEMO Alice in Wonderland, only even darker

For once, here's an asylum that isn't just a bunch of rusty cells, upturned wheelchairs and muttering inmates, although admittedly fear does feature heavily in *Fran Bow*. It's a sad, funny, dark and wonderfully written adventure game about a girl incarcerated in a psychiatric ward after the death of her parents. Fran sees strange and terrifying creatures around her—creatures that will both help and hinder her in her quest to escape the asylum and find her missing cat (yes, it's another game in the expanding girl-missing-cat genre). This demo contains the opening segment, offering a glimpse of the game's captivating story, horrifying imagery, and exquisite animation.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/FranBow

8 FIRE AND BRIMSTONE
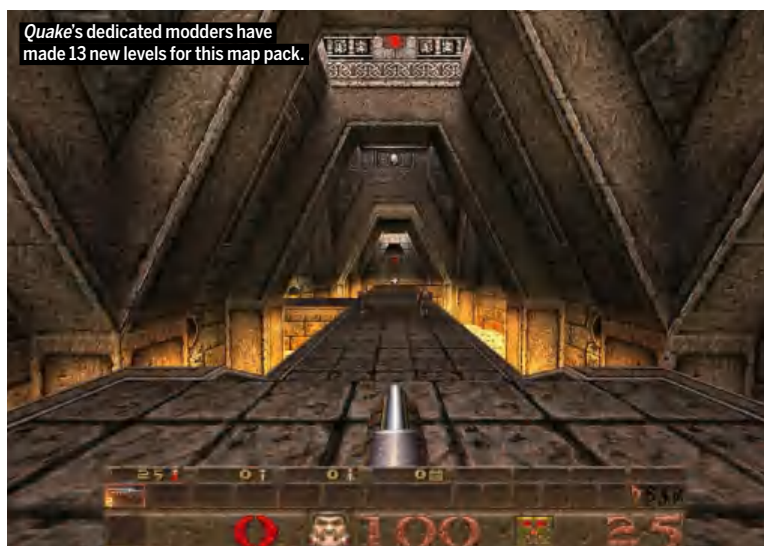
Quake's dedicated modders have made 13 new levels for this map pack.

MODS Get ready to *Quake* in your boots

Jams aren't just related to indie games, or indeed the 'preserves and chutneys' shelf of your grandmother's pantry—people have been making stuff to arbitrary time limits for years. The sixth Quake Map Jam asked modders to create levels based on the theme 'fire and brimstone', and the results have been collected in this mission package.

It's not exactly a theme that wildly departs from *Quake*'s M.O., so you can expect a lot of lava, and more than a few hellbeasts trying to turn you into sausage meat. But there's some interesting stuff in here, from puzzles to boss fights to outright platforming at times. More than any other id game, *Quake* is about architecture and atmosphere, and many of these mods play to this, offering navigational challenges in spaces full of secrets.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/FireAndBrimstone

9 KILLING FLOOR 2

GEAR Wipe the floor with these hats

Killing Floor 2's Steam Workshop page functions pretty differently from most, in that it's a list of hats, weapons and accessories that will potentially be added to the game proper as official-ish assets. You can of course still find and download *Killing Floor 2* maps and mods elsewhere.

While you can't grab the following items from the Workshop, you can vote whether you want them to appear in-game, and their creators will receive a cut of any revenue they generate.

As with any Workshop page, there's a sea of crap on there, but the section is growing all the time. Even now it encompasses masks, guns, and stylish headwear (hats being an essential item for any aspiring zombie hunter). These are the three best bits of clobber you'll soon be able to customize your characters with… if Steam users vote with their consciences, of course.

FLOOR SHOW
Zombie-killer accessories
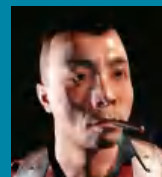
1 CIGAR
Churchill famously loved chomping cigars, and I hear he also battled the odd zombie after the war. Reflect on WWII, and fill your lungs with tar and nicotine, with this.

www.bit.ly/KillingGear1
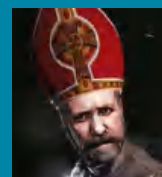
2 POPE HAT
Zombies are notoriously anti-organized-religion, which is why this extravagant papal hat should be your first line of defense in the endless war against the undead.

www.bit.ly/KillingGear2

3 FLATCAP
The must-have accessory for every shotgun-wielding English country nut. Wear with a beard and thick-rimmed glasses for the perfect '2015 UK Guy' party costume.

www.bit.ly/KillingGear3

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10 SUBWAY ADVENTURE

FREEWARE Skeleton-based delays on the Bakerloo line

Stephen Lavelle's game will be familiar to seasoned London Underground users, with its aimless civilians, its awkward movement system, and surreal metro tunnel network. You're exploring the Dream World of Sadness Metro here, riding the train from stop to stop with all the skeletons and clock-people, taking in as many bizarre sights as you can along the way. Sights like a lovely forest, a station of purest gold, the inside of an austere monolith, a vibrant mess of jagged shapes, and a platform that opens onto an endless sea.

Subway Adventure offers constant peculiar delights, in a huge, fragmented world with something new around every corner.

DOWNLOAD AT www.bit.ly/SubwayAdventure

"Through the nuke-battered ruins of Washington DC"

Dogmeat is an optional, but worthwhile, companion.

FALLOUT 3

It's time to revisit the Capital Wasteland. *By Andy Kelly*

When you emerge from Vault 101 you're blinded by a bright, white light. Having spent your entire life in an underground fallout shelter, you've never seen the sun before. Then your eyes adjust and the Capital Wasteland fades into view as Inon Zur's haunting score swells. This is the moment that defines *Fallout 3*, and all of Bethesda's RPGs: gazing across that bleak, broken vista brimming with possibilities, and deciding where to go and what to do first.

Seven years on, it still has impact. With *Fallout 4* on the horizon, I thought it was time for another journey through the nuke-battered ruins of Washington DC. Stepping out onto that hill, watching the vista fade into view, I still feel a rush of excitement—even though, after hundreds of hours in the Capital Wasteland, I know it inside out. The locations and quests are always the same, but doing them in a different order, choosing different paths and using different weapons, makes it feel almost like a new experience. I'm still finding new things and hearing new lines of dialogue, even now.

The Vault 101 sequence at the beginning isn't so great. It's an enforced hour of exposition, following the main character from birth, literally, until their teenage

▶ NEED TO KNOW

RELEASED
2008

PUBLISHER
Bethesda Softworks

DEVELOPER
Bethesda Game Studios

LINK
www.fallout.bethsoft.com

CENTRAL PERK
The weirdest upgrades

CANNIBAL
Eat corpses to restore 25 health, but lose 1 karma in the process.

PARTY BOY
Drink alcohol without ever becoming addicted to the stuff.

NUCLEAR ANOMALY
Unleash a nuclear blast if your HP drops below 20. It's science.

RAD REGENERATION
Broken limbs heal if you have advanced rad poisoning. Because.

CHILD AT HEART
Unlocks additional dialogue options when speaking to kids.

PUPPIES!
If faithful Dogmeat dies, a new dog spawns near Vault 101.

Liberty Prime is activated.

Nuclear war is hell for the property market.

Downtown DC is extremely dangerous.

years when they escape, or are expelled from, the vault. You have a lot of options, it's true. You can surrender your weapons to the Overseer and leave peacefully, or you can kill him and fight your way out, upsetting his daughter (your oldest friend). You can sneak past the guards or you can kill them all. It's a decent quest, but too damn slow—especially that awkward birthday party. Luckily there are mods to skip it. It's when you reach the surface that *Fallout 3* really gets going.

Technically, it hasn't aged well. The world is blighted by grubby low-res textures and the character models are hideous. To be fair, they were hideous in 2008. But the Capital Wasteland is still a wonderfully evocative place. The gray, overcast skies and shattered landscape make for a strangely beautiful post-apocalypse. There's a lot of empty space—I mean, it is a wasteland after all—but Bethesda scattered enough interesting things around that it never feels barren. There are little stories everywhere, both humorous and poignant. I was caught off guard when I entered an old house in the middle of nowhere and found the embracing skeletons of a couple on a bed, frozen in time.

That's pretty uncharacteristic of the game in general, though. *Fallout 3* is very much a black comedy, with bomb-worshipping cults, talking trees, two-headed cows, and all manner of other silliness. Tonally, it's all over the place, absurdist comedy staggering clumsily into attempts at more serious storytelling. One minute you're facing a moral quandary involving rescuing, or exposing, an on-the-run android; the next you're fighting giant mutated ants straight out of a B movie. But the upside of this inconsistency is variety, and every quest offers something different. If you want a somber, reflective post-apocalyptic experience, read The Road.

BAD DAD
As is the case with most, if not all, Bethesda RPGs, the side-quests are the highlight. The main story—about your father trying to bring clean water to the wasteland—is meandering and fairly dull. Your old man, whose face is generated to resemble the character you create, is played by Liam Neeson, who sounds bored to death. Getting an actor of that caliber in the game made for a great press release, but it's pretty obvious that he's phoning it in. His

EXTRA LIFE *Fallout 3's DLC, from best to worst*
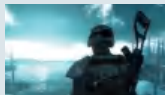
GREAT ← ——————————————————————— → AWFUL

POINT LOOKOUT
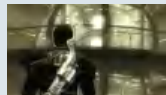A set of new quests set in a murky swamp area.

BROKEN STEEL
Extends the main game's story, adds more Liberty Prime.

THE PITT
Fight slavers in post-apocalyptic Pittsburgh.

OPERATION: ANCHORAGE
Relive a battle from before the bombs.

MOTHERSHIP ZETA
Get abducted by aliens and escape.

You should probably aim for the head.

IT MADE FOR A GREAT PRESS RELEASE, BUT LIAM NEESON SOUNDS BORED TO DEATH

character is a charisma vacuum, and makes Qui-Gon Jinn seem brimming with personality in comparison.

You spend much of the early game tracking his movements across the wasteland. You do this by asking people if they've seen 'a middle-aged man'—and that's as specific as the description gets. When they made it so that the father's face is unique to each player, the writers must have gone "Shit!" But, despite the vague description, you eventually find him and learn about his grand experiment, Project Purity. It should be an emotional moment: father and son (or daughter) finally reunited. But Neeson's comatose acting sucks all the life from the scene. It doesn't really matter, however, because the side-quests are so strange, so funny, and so entertaining.

There's still a lot wrong with *Fallout 3*, however. The companions, including gurning supermutant

Fawkes, are insubstantial. They're never fleshed out, making it hard to care about them. The gun combat is weedy and unsatisfying—outside of the slow-mo precision aiming mode VATS, that is. And the quests don't have as many branching paths or alternate outcomes as other Bethesda games. These are all problems that were fixed in Obsidian's superb *Fallout: New Vegas*.

HOUSE WINS

This spin-off is, in many ways, a better game than *Fallout 3*, with superior writing and quest design, more richly detailed companions, and deeper RPG elements. But it doesn't feel as apocalyptic, its more vibrant setting having escaped the worst of the bombing. The games share the same engine and many of the same mechanics, but they feel distinct. They have their own look, feel, and personality. *Fallout 3*'s gloomy, gray-skied setting is more evocative, but in terms of writing and design, *New Vegas* feels more like the earlier 2D games—likely a result of many of Obsidian's developers having previously worked on *Fallouts 1* and *2*.

Bethesda is a lot better at making RPGs these days. *Fallout 3* is still fun, but it feels janky and bloated compared to *Skyrim*, which streamlined a lot of the more fiddly elements. Also, you'll have a hard time running it on modern versions of Windows. Some people report no problems at all, but you may well have to spend time tweaking settings to be able to play without it crashing constantly. It's high time Bethesda released a patch to make it run on new PCs. The version currently on Steam still has Games For Windows Live in it, for pity's sake.

People will always want to return to *Fallout 3*, even when *4* is out. It's one of the most satisfying RPGs on PC to just go for a wander in. Pick a direction, walk, and see what you find. It might be just another mutated mole-rat, but it could be a forgotten vault to explore or a new wasteland weirdo to make friends with. Your character is known as the Lone Wanderer, and it's the perfect name: the magic of *Fallout 3* isn't chasing your boring dad around or finding a way to purify water, but wandering the broken remains of civilization and shaping your own destiny. ■

L.A. NOIRE'S LOS ANGELES

This detailed recreation of 1940s LA is an incredible place. *By Andy Kelly*

Some of the crime scenes, particularly on the homicide desk, are horribly detailed. Many of the cases are based on real crimes from the period.

I 've been to Los Angeles, and I didn't like it much. It's hot, it's crowded, it's filthy, and you can't walk anywhere. But as a setting for a work of fiction, it's one of my favorite places. From Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels to Ridley Scott's Blade Runner, the City of Angels is a resonant setting for a story. A lot of games are set there, but only one captures the dark, romantic urban sprawl found in the best LA fiction: Rockstar's ambitious, flawed detective adventure *L.A. Noire*.

Compared to *Grand Theft Auto V*'s dense parody of the city, *L.A. Noire*'s setting doesn't look all that impressive—at least not technically. But what has endured is its almost perverse attention to detail. Developer Team Bondi's reported budget for the game was $50 million, and you can see it in every lovingly detailed street corner, costume, prop, and licensed, period-appropriate vehicle. Playing *L.A. Noire* is like time travel, and it makes me wish more developers would squander obscene amounts of money creating authentic historical settings like this.

There are dozens of famous landmarks to visit, from Grauman's Chinese Theatre to the Bradbury building, but the impressive detail in *L.A. Noire* goes much deeper. I spent a good ten minutes just studying a breakfast table in a suspect's house. There are two plates with the remnants of toast and maybe beans. A salt and pepper shaker. A coffee pot. Some unopened mail. I imagined someone at Team Bondi researching, modeling, and texturing this stuff,

and realized just how much love was poured into these environments. This kind of absurd, granular realism will be missed by most players, but even if you don't notice it, it's what makes *L.A. Noire*'s settings so convincing.

You visit a lot of people's houses in *L.A. Noire*, from crummy one-room apartments to the palatial homes of the rich and famous. Every item of furniture, kitchen appliance, and food wrapper has been painstakingly researched and replicated. The interiors are cluttered and lived-in, and environmental clues will often subtly hint at the truth behind a case. Those plates, for example. The woman in the house says she's been alone all morning, so why are there two recently-eaten breakfasts on the table? The game doesn't point this little detail out, but leaves you to discover it for yourself.

Nosing around these cluttered interiors is encouraged as you search for clues and details to grill suspects

about. An insurance policy, a photo torn in half, a love letter. But in the city itself, the detail is just *there*, and you're never forced to look at it. Driving around, you really get a feel for the game's vivid urban landscape: the architecture, the cars, the fashion, the light, the mood. You'll drive past a diner and see people inside, eating hamburgers and reading newspapers. Drive to the top end of the map and you'll see the old 'Hollywoodland' sign perched in the hills that loom over the city.
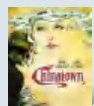
MUSIC BOX
One of my favorite details is the music that leaks through the windows of passing cars. *L.A. Noire*'s radio station, KTI, enforces the period setting, and there's some really great music playing on there: Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sisters' 'Pistol Packin' Mama', T-Bone Walker's 'Bobby Sox Blues', Hank Williams' 'Move It On Over'. Anyone who's finished the game will have these tracks permanently etched into their brains. Combined with the visuals—and other touches such as advertising billboards and radio commercials—the music only adds to the game's powerful feeling of stepping into history.

It's a shame *L.A. Noire* came out in 2011, because just imagine how its period city would look recreated by today's technology. I really doubt Rockstar will ever return to it, especially now that Team Bondi are no more, but I hope they do. Not only do I want to see a version of 1940s Los Angeles with the visual fidelity of *GTA*'s Los Santos, but I feel that the detective elements could be fleshed out more. *L.A. Noire* is an enjoyable police procedural, but it still feels to me like a proof of concept for something much grander. Reviews were mixed, and many people look back on the game as a failed experiment, but I'll always love it and its remarkable city. I won't be returning to the real place any time soon, though. ◼

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASED
November 2011

DEVELOPER
Team Bondi

PUBLISHER
Rockstar

LINK
www.rockstargames.com

SILVER SCREEN
Great films to watch after playing

CHINATOWN
1974
An Oscar-winning neo-noir mystery starring Jack Nicholson as dogged private detective Jake Gittes. A modern classic, to which *L.A. Noire* owes a lot.

DOUBLE INDEMNITY
1944
Perhaps the best example of the film noir genre. This beautifully-shot tale of an insurance scam gone horribly wrong still looks stunning 70 years later.

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL
1997
Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce, and Kevin Spacey give career-best performances in this tense thriller set on the crime-ridden streets of post-war LA.

MULHOLLAND DRIVE
2001
David Lynch's typically dreamlike ode to the city of Los Angeles is among his best work, revealing the ominous underside of Hollywood.

A case late in the game takes you on a tour of famous Los Angeles landmarks. It's a great excuse to explore the city and take in the sights.
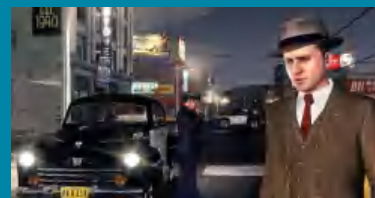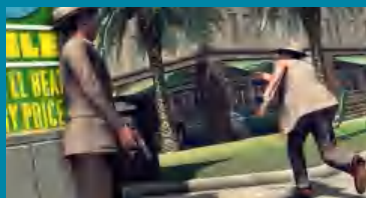
GROUP TEST

By Dave James

SKYLAKE MOTHERBOARDS

New motherboards for the new Intel CPU

Q&A

Why does Skylake require a new motherboard?
The big change is that the new CPUs support the more modern DDR4 memory as well as DDR3. That means lower-powered RAM with a minimum base speed of 2133MHz as standard. Memory isn't that big a deal for gaming, but it does mean the latest generation has caught up with high-end platforms.

Memory? Boring. Is that the only reason?
There's also the hefty overclocking potential of these new processors, achieved by Intel moving technology back onto the motherboard, including the voltage regulators. They're one of the things that give the Skylake CPUs their overclocking skills: both my i5 and i7 K-series chips have hit 4.9GHz comfortably.

Do the motherboards themselves offer anything new?
Most of the ones in this test also support the latest USB advances, and the new USB 3.1 standard brings with it a new Type-C connector that doesn't care which way around you plug it in. That's not even the most exciting thing about it: Type-C can also carry video as well as power.

What about PCIe SSDs?
That's the final part of the Skylake puzzle. The compatible 100-series chipset offers far more PCIe lanes, and now the motherboard itself has PCIe 3.0 support rather than PCIe 2.0. That means the GPU can access the lanes direct from the CPU, while the speedy PCIe SSDs can plug into the motherboard via the latest standard.

Dictionary

DDR4—Low-power, high-performance memory.

PCIe 3.0 - Offers around double the bandwidth of PCIe 2.0.

Adopting a new-generation Intel processor often requires fitting a new motherboard, too. Sometimes that can seem like an annoying contrivance, engineered to sell more motherboards. But sometimes there are chip changes that really do require new hardware. Intel's Skylake series is one of those.

MSI Z170A GAMING M7

www.msi.com **$227**

→ **When it comes to appointing the best overall motherboard in this test it's a straight up, toe-to-toe fight between this MSI and the classic Maximus VIII Hero from Asus. And it's the MSI that just pushes ahead.**

1 It was a close thing. They're both available for a similar price, both sport high-end componentry and both manage to hit similar levels of performance. This Gaming M7 board just has the edge in the benchmark stakes, and just about has the lead on the feature side too.

Both boards managed to get the most out of my Core i7-6700K processor, running at 4.2GHz out of the box and hitting 4.9GHz with only a little BIOS overclocking work. I managed to get both the MSI and the Asus booting at 5GHz and I'm sure with a little voltage work I could get it stable at that speed too. I do slightly prefer the BIOS interface on the MSI board, however. It's slick and responsive to mouse input too.

One other point where the MSI stands out against the Hero is the extra M.2 slot, enabling two PCIe SSDs to run off the Z170 chipset.

The price is great too, having been recently cut to bring it in line with the excellent Hero board.

90%

ASUS MAXIMUS VIII HERO

www.asus.com **$234**

→ **The last generation Republic of Gamers Hero motherboard was always my go-to base for my Ivy Bridge and Broadwell testing rigs. For Skylake Asus has created another outstanding iteration of the Hero range with serious performance prowess.**

2 There is almost nothing between the MSI Gaming M7 and the Maximus VIII Hero, but for my money the Asus board is *just about* about eclipsed by the MSI. That's not to say the Hero isn't an excellent board, and I've always had great experiences with Asus reliability too, which is precisely why these have always been my test-rig motherboards.

The Hero lacks the MSI's extra M.2 SSD slot, but that's a very minor thing: few people will have a pair of PCIe drives in their system. It's just that when performance and price are this close you've got to start splitting hairs. And the performance of the Hero is just as good as the MSI, trading blows in my Cinebench and x264 HD encoding tests. There's nothing between them in my gaming tests either.

The Hero is also a really impressive overclocker, but as an RoG board that's not at all surprising. I'd have no hesitation recommending the Hero as a choice; either of these top two boards would make for outstanding Skylake gaming rigs.

89%

MSI Z170A GAMING M9 ACK

www.msi.com **$400**

→ When it comes to the money's-no-object winner in this test, MSI's powerful Gaming M9 ACK is the obvious choice. But coming in at not far off twice the price of my top two picks, it struggles to justify the expense.

3

The ACK has a overall lead in performance. In the CPU tests it pulls ahead of both the Gaming M7 and Hero boards, and when it comes to PCIe storage speed it's the fastest in this test. It also posts the fastest minimum framerate scores—the only real difference between these boards in-game.

MSI has gone to town on the feature set too, matching the seriously pricey Republic of Gaming boards to be found when you venture beyond the Hero's price bracket . It has wireless networking and a high-end digital audio converter on board too, with multiple headphone amps.

But how much any of that will affect your gaming experience is debatable. When you have to rely on benchmark numbers to detect the difference in performance, rather than anything tangible, do you really want to pay twice what you would for either the Hero or the M7 board? The M9 ACK has all the features, but if you're not necessarily going to be using them, it's unlikely to be worth the extra expense.

87%

GIGABYTE Z170X-GAMING 5

www.gigabyte.com **$170**

→ At the more value-oriented end of the Z170 motherboard market we've got this Gigabyte board going up against the Asus Pro Gaming on the next page. And, as with the top pairing in this test, it's a close run thing.

4

This time it's the Asus board that takes the win. Again, that's not to say that its opponent is a bad option, it's just that when it comes to straight performance the Gaming 5 happens to be at the bottom of the very tightly-grouped Z170 boards.

Where it gets into difficulty is that other Z170 motherboards bypass the standard all cores multiplier limitations Intel generally has in the spec. The 6700K is only meant to hit its max turbo of 4.2GHz on single threaded duties, but most boards ignore that opting to run at 4.2GHz no matter what. In my testing both this Gigabyte and the Asus Pro Gaming default to 4GHz as standard.

That's easily got around in the BIOS, but when overclocking I could only squeeze 4.7GHz out of the Gigabyte, while the Pro Gaming Asus managed to get all the way up to the 4.9GHz maximum. It was also the weakest of the Z170 boards in for gaming performance too, but the motherboard has so little tangible impact the difference is almost impossible to see.

80%

5

ASUS Z170 PRO GAMING

www.asus.com **$195**

→ As one of the more competitively priced Z170 motherboards in this round-up, the Asus Pro Gaming deserves its time in the sun. It's also the board you're going to see a lot in the pre-built gaming PCs of the near future.

5

Asus has been one of the top motherboard manufacturers for as long as I've been in the industry. And when you look at the system builders, and what boards they're using, you'll see a lot of Z170 Pro Gaming boards in their machines. The combination of price and performance makes it a tough board to beat.

At stock speeds it does lag behind its Hero stablemate and the excellent MSI Gaming M7, as a consequence of being stuck at 4GHz with the 6700K out of the box. But the overclocking performance means you don't have to worry about that as this board will happily stretch your CPU. I got up to 4.9GHz with the Pro Gaming, and if you don't want to get your hands dirty the excellent Asus BIOS will easily take on the OC work itself.

The Pro Gaming is also remarkably feature-packed for a bargain board, so the compromises really are few. I'd still pay the extra for either the Hero or the Maximus, but this is a great alternative.

88%

FATAL1TY Z170 GAMING ITX/AC

www.asrock.com **$160**

→ There is something immensely pleasing about a powerful mini-ITX motherboard, and they make my inner geek very happy. This latest mini-sized ASRock is right up there with the best of the full-size boards.

6

You're never going to get the feature-set you can get with a full-spec ATX motherboard—there just isn't room. That's why there's only a single PCIe x16 lane on this board and no support for other PCIe devices, such as sound cards or the like. But there is a mini-PCIe connector, taken up by a WiFi card, and an underslung M.2 socket for PCIe SSDs.

That means that this diminutive ASRock Z170 has all the features you need to make for a stunning little gaming rig. Pair it with an overclocked Core i7 processor and the pricey AMD R9 Nano graphics card and you'll have all the gaming power you can fit into a tiny chassis.

Understandably, given the limited space for power componentry, I only managed to hit 4.7GHz when overclocking. But arguably you're not going to want to ride your CPU so hard in such a small PC anyway. Regardless, if you want to make yourself a powerful but pint-sized Skylake gaming rig, ASRock's excellent Gaming ITX/AC is an outstanding option.

88%

6

7

ASROCK B150 GAMING K4

www.asrock.com **$110**

→ While it would be nice solely to make use of the top of the range, all-singing, all-dancing Z170 chipset for your new Skylake PC that's not always going to be realistic. There is another way: the lower-caste B150 platform.

7

This is the cheaper option, compared with the Z170 boards, and a great choice for the non K-series i5 chips due to arrive later this year. It's also a good choice for the upgrade crew because this B150 board takes advantage of the Skylake processors' ability to operate with either DDR4 or DDR3 memory. If you're working with DDR3, you'll be able to port over your existing system memory. And that means there are fewer new components to fit around your new CPU and motherboard purchases.

You can't overclock, however. The CPU is limited to the base 4GHz clockspeed, which is why the ASRock B150 benches lower than other boards. But in-game it's just as capable as the competition.

There are other compromises, namely a lack of PCIe storage options—so no M.2 nor SATA Express—and no USB 3.1 support either. But those higher-end options aside you're not missing out on anything that would really limit your machine's gaming performance. And that's what's really important, isn't it?

81%

STACKED UP

■ PRICE ($)	■ CINEBENCH INDEX SCORE @ stock CPU speed	■ GTA V 1080p Minimum framerate

1 MSI Z170A Gaming M7
227
909
21

2 Asus Maximus VIII Hero
234
908
23

3 MSI Z170A Gaming M9 ACK
400
917
24

4 Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 5
170
874
14

5 Asus Z170 Pro Gaming
195
880
16

6 ASRock Z170 Gaming ITX/AC
160
914
23

7 ASRock B150 Gaming K4
110
869
25

ESSENTIALS

	Chipset	Form factor	PCIe slots	Multi GPU support	Memory slots
1	Z170	ATX	3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 4x PCIe 3.0 x1	Nvidia SLI, AMD CrossFire	4x DDR4
2	Z170	ATX	3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe 3.0 x1	Nvidia SLI, AMD CrossFire	4x DDR4
3	Z170	ATX	3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe 3.0 x1	Nvidia SLI, AMD CrossFire	4x DDR4
4	Z170	ATX	3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 4x PCIe 3.0 x1	Nvidia SLI, AMD CrossFire	4x DDR4
5	Z170	ATX	3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe 3.0 x1	Nvidia SLI, AMD CrossFire	4x DDR4
6	Z170	Mini ITX	1x PCIe 3.0 x16, 1x mPCIe	N/A	2x DDR4
7	B150	ATX	2x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe 3.0 x1	AMD CrossFire	4x DDR3

Review

REVIEW
Gaming hardware

RAZER MAMBA

www.razerzone.com **$150**

MOUSE

→ **The Razer Mamba is almost the Deathadder. This 2015 evolution of the Mamba implements an interesting click-force adjustment feature for independent tuning of the left and right mouse buttons, and a new sensor with a max 16,000CPI. It's almost a wireless Deathadder, but its minute differences, and the added weight of its rechargeable batteries, keep it from matching the best gaming mouse.**

The Mamba nails its physical design with a fantastic shape, leaving customization to the force required to click the left and right mouse buttons. This can be separately adjusted to between 45 to 95 grams. Razer recommends the lighter force for MOBAs, where you want to click very quickly, and the higher force for shooters that require more "distinct and controlled" clicks. In my testing, the adjustment was perceptible, but didn't make a dramatic difference.

The battery life is good, but not fantastic. Despite my setting the Mamba to sleep after lying dormant for ten minutes, it died overnight twice, losing between 25-30% battery while I was away.

The device can also be used in wired mode, which makes it essentially a heavier Deathadder. But despite the similarity, I don't like holding the Mamba as much. It has a slightly different arch. When I use a palm grip, my fingers end up hanging over the front by a couple of centimeters. My fingers hang off the Deathadder a tiny bit less, and the difference means the Mamba doesn't feel quite as good to hold.

The Mamba does feel great in a claw grip, and I have no complaints about its 16,000 CPI sensor: it performed flawlessly and exhibited no jitter or acceleration in *Unreal Tournament, Killing Floor 2* or *League of Legends*.

At $150, however, this is a very expensive mouse. It does feel like it: the ability to work in wireless/wired mode, plus its adjustable click-force, makes it stand out among the competition. But between its price and the small issues I've had with it here and there, it falls short of being the best buy as either a wireless or wired option.

81%

APPROX LENGTH: 5" / **APPROX WIDTH:** 2.76" / **APPROX HEIGHT:** 1.67" / **WEIGHT:** 125 g / 0.27 lbs

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BUYER'S GUIDE

Build the best PC for your budget

ADVANCED

MID-RANGE

BUDGET

KEY

Budget build

PC gaming is for everyone. Pick the parts you want to build a new, well-rounded PC for a good price.

Mid-range build

You want to run every new game at 1080p 60fps. This recommended build will see you through.

Advanced build

You're looking for the best PC on the market and superior components. But you still want to spend smart.
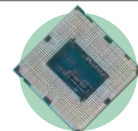
MOTHERBOARD

H81M-P33
MSI **$46**

A bargain-priced microATX board that pairs nicely with the Pentium G3258, letting you overclock into 4GHz+ territory.

PROCESSOR

Pentium Anniversary G3258
Intel **$70**

Ludicrously cheap and overclockable, the dual-core G3258 rivals far more expensive processors in gaming performance.

GRAPHICS CARD

AMD R9 380 2GB
Sapphire **$200**

AMD's R9 380 is a refreshed R9 285, but it still packs enough power to handle 1080p gaming at a decent price.

COOLER

Hyper 212 EVO
Cooler Master **$35**

A legendary cooler, still the best for its very reasonable price. Overclock to your heart's content with this.

MEMORY

Crucial Ballistix Sport 1600MHz (8GB)
Crucial **$51**

Cheap, low-profile, and reliable. Does its job. The best 8GB you'll find.

POWER SUPPLY

EVGA 500W 80PLUS Certified ATX12V/EPS12V
EVGA **$45**

A reliable PSU with enough juice to run your CPU and a reasonably power-hungry GPU.

SSD

BX100 250GB
Crucial **$85**

Thinking about skimping and going HDD-only? Don't. The BX100 is much faster and a fantastic performer for the price.

CASE

Carbide 200R
Corsair **$70**

The 200R gets the job done with toolless trays and plenty of space. ATX-sized, so you can upgrade that microATX board later.

DISPLAY

VX2263SMHL
Viewsonic **$130**

An affordable 1080p monitor with vibrant IPS image quality and low response times. A real bargain.

KEYBOARD

CM Storm QuickFire Rapid
Coolermaster **$80**

A no-frills mechanical keyboard with a standard layout and Cherry switches. We recommend Browns or Reds for gaming.

MOUSE

G303 Daedalus Apex
Logitech **$46**

The best gaming mouse sensor in existence paired with buttons with extremely low click distance. Especially ideal for MOBA players.

HEADSET

HyperX Cloud
Kingston **$80**

Our favorite gaming headset, and it happens to be as cheap as plenty of inferior cans. A good buy for any gaming rig.

BUDGET BUILD

Enjoy 1080p gaming without breaking the bank

TOTAL
$938

MID-RANGE BUILD

Our recommended build for playing the latest games

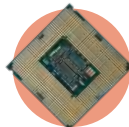## TOTAL $1599

|	
MOTHERBOARD	**Z170 Pro Gaming** Asus **$160** The latest revision of our favorite gaming motherboard, with an M.2 PCIe x4 slot, Intel network port, USB 3.1 and SLI support.
PROCESSOR	**i5-6600K** Intel **$243** Intel's new Skylake processor is nearly as fast as an i7 for gaming. Comes with some important memory/storage speed boosts.
GRAPHICS CARD	**GTX 970 Gaming 4G** MSI **$335** Offers the best price/performance ratio right now, and MSI's model is cheap and overclockable, with a quiet cooler.
COOLER	**Hyper 212 EVO** Cooler Master **$35** If it ain't broke… the Hyper 212 EVO is a great cooler for the price. Save a bit of money in your mid-range build.
MEMORY	**Ballistix Sport (8GB)** Crucial **$60** 8GB of reasonably fast DDR4, and one of the cheapest deals you'll find. Corsair is reliable, and the RAM's overclockable to boot.
POWER SUPPLY	**CX600M** Corsair **$65** 80Plus Bronze efficient, with enough power for a good gaming PC. Modular design is a great perk that cuts down on cable tangles.
SSD	**850 EVO 250GB** Samsung **$98** Samsung retains its top spot on the SSD pile with the fantastically priced, very speedy 850 EVO. Still the best price/performance.
CASE	**S340** NZXT **$75** The stylish S340 has some nice touches, such as removable dust filters and space for huge liquid cooling radiators.
DISPLAY	**G257HU** Acer **$280** A step up from 1080p to 1440p territory, with a vibrant IPS display and good response times at a strong price.
KEYBOARD	**K70 Vengeance** Corsair **$110** A great, full-size mechanical keyboard with an ergonomic wrist rest. We recommend Cherry Brown or Red switches for gaming.
MOUSE	**Deathadder 2013** Razer **$58** There's not a huge range of price differences on the best mice, so stick with the best for your mid-range build too.
HEADSET	**HyperX Cloud** Kingston **$80** Even for our medium build, we still recommend this decently-priced headset. There's nothing better for the money.

MOTHERBOARD

ROG Maximus VIII Hero
Asus **$240**

Fantastic overclocking and stability, with a great UEFI BIOS from Asus. M.2, USB 3.1 and on-board power, reset, CMOS, etc, buttons.

PROCESSOR
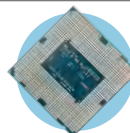
Core i7-6700K
Intel **$339**

Intel's new top-of-the-line Skylake processor. Its new chipset includes important memory/storage speed boosts.

GRAPHICS CARD

GTX 980 Gaming 4G
MSI **$520**

Right now the GTX 980 is the best value single-GPU card for ultra 1080p and 1440p gaming, bar none.

COOLER

H90
Corsair **$88**

Quiet even under heavy load, the H90 gets the cooling job done with a single 140mm radiator, easily fitting a variety of cases.

MEMORY

Ripjaws V Series DDR4 2666 16GB
G.SKILL **$125**

16GB of fast DDR4. RAM speeds make only a small difference, but the 2666 starting speed is stable and widely compatible.

POWER SUPPLY

Supernova 850W G2 80 Plus Gold
EVGA **$145**

A reliable, quiet, gold-rated EVGA power supply, modular, with enough juice to sustain two overclocked graphics cards and a CPU.

SSD

850 EVO 500GB
Samsung **$162**

The 850 EVO is so good, there's not much need to step up to the more expensive 850 Pro for a gaming rig. Just get a bigger drive.

CASE

Fractal Design Define R5
Fractal **$111**

A beautiful and functional case, the R5 has sound absorption, water-cooling support, dust filters and masses of drive space.

DISPLAY

Predator XB270HAbprz 144Hz G-Sync
Acer **$800**

Simply the best: a 27" 1440p 144Hz IPS display, with Nvidia's variable refresh tech.

KEYBOARD

Ducky One
Ducky **$120**

An elegant set of keys from mechanical keyboard fan favorite Ducky. Renowned for their impeccable feel and build quality.

MOUSE

Deathadder 2013
Razer **$58**

Even if you've got money to burn, the Deathadder really is the best mouse you can buy right now.

HEADSET

H Wireless
SteelSeries **$273**

Our favorite wireless gaming headset, with great sound quality and a convenient battery swapping system for long gaming sessions.

ADVANCED BUILD

Go above and beyond with a PC powerful enough to end worlds

TOTAL $2981

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